

THE HEIRESS AND HER GUARDIAN.

A TALE OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE.

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CHAPTER XVI.

HER LAST WORDS.

CIS TRAVERS was breakfasting at his friend's rooms in the Temple. It was a bright clear morning; the sun streamed in through the big dusty windows, and lit up the dingy old rooms cheerily. There were eggs, and kidneys, and muffins, all laid out on quaint old-fashioned blue china, in which Wattie took great pride, being somewhat of a connoisseur; a finely-chased silver teapot, and curious-shaped sugar-bowl and milk jug—like the china, relics of past extravagance; whilst on the fire the bright copper kettle steamed and fizzed away merrily. It was altogether as daintily set-out a little breakfast-table as you could wish to see. And the two young men were in the best of spirits.

"Fetch me the kettle, Cis, and help yourself to kidneys," says Wattie, standing up while he pours out the tea, after a fashion that male beings have when they preside at the breakfast-table. "Did you see Gretchen last night?"

"Yes, I looked in on my way home," answers Cis, with his mouth full of muffin.

"Ah! very imprudent of you," says Wattie, censoriously. "Well, how is she getting on?"

"O, first rate; two new pupils since last week, and she looks as rosy and happy as possible. Do think! the dear little girl offered me three pounds, to pay for the doctor's bill, she said. Of course I wouldn't take it."

"I wish she wasn't quite so fond of you, and I wish she would marry David Anderson," said wiser Wattie.

"Well, I don't, then—marry that boor, indeed!"

"You had better take care that Miss Blair doesn't hear of your evening visits to Gretchen; there would be an end of your chances there," answered his friend.

"Well, of all the rubbish I ever heard you talk!" began Cis, impatiently; and

then there came a sharp knock, and Mrs. Stiles's head, in extreme dishabille, decorated with manifold whity-brown curl-papers, surmounted with a far from spotless cap, which, from its peculiar shape and crumpled appearance, suggested irresistibly the idea that she must have slept in it, was poked furtively in at the door.

"A tallygrum for you, please, sir," said this lady, holding out the dusky pink missive in the corner of her apron.

"You may call it rubbish, Cis," Wattie was saying, in answer to his friend's last remark, and laughing carelessly as he took the telegram from Mrs. Stiles's hand; and then he opened it leisurely, for nobody now-a-days feels nervous at the sight of a telegram.

A minute of silence whilst he read, and then a cry of horror burst from his lips:

"O my God!"

"What is the matter?" cried Cis, springing to his feet in amazement, as his friend turned as white as a sheet, and the pink paper fluttered to the floor.

Cis picked it up and read:

"From Miss Blair, Sotherne Court, to Walter Ellison, Esq., Harcourt Buildings, Temple.—Georgie has had a bad accident. Come down at once to Sotherne, and bring Cis. Lose no time."

They bore it well, as men do such sudden blows; Wattie, as might have been expected, being the least upset of the two.

"We shall catch the 11.25 if we look sharp," he said, as soon as he could speak, rapidly turning over the pages of Bradshaw.

"Go back to your rooms, and get your bag, Cis, and meet me at the station. You must look sharp, though—we have only thirty-five minutes."

And Cis, who was shaking and trembling all over, obeyed him in silence.

Down at Sotherne Court, Georgie on her sick bed was moaning over and over again:

"Have they come yet? when will they be here? how much longer will they be?" in a weak fretful voice.

On the bed by her side lay old Chanticleer. Early in the morning she had asked for him, and a messenger had been sent to Broadley to bring him over.

"Don't think me foolish," she had said, "but I should like him to lie on the bed where I can stroke him, poor old boy!" And her lightest wish was, of course, a law to those who watched by her.

The old hound lay with his head resting on his great white paws, gazing up at her fixedly and piteously, with every now and then a low whine of sympathy. And who shall say that in that faithful canine heart there was not at least a partial knowledge of the dread change that was about to befall his young mistress? Little Flora, who had been brought over with the dog, crouched at the bottom of the bed, trying to stifle her sobs.

"Don't cry, Flora," said her sister once. "Look here! I leave poor old Chanticleer to you; you will be very fond of him, wont you, for my sake? and don't forget to give the poor old boy his bread and milk in the morning—he will miss it so, if he doesn't get it; and now he has so few teeth, he likes it better than anything else. You will promise me not to forget it, Flora?"

"Yes, Georgie," sobbed the little girl; and then Juliet drew her away into an adjoining room, and took her on her lap, and let her sob and cry upon her shoulder till she was fairly worn out.

By three o'clock the two young men had arrived. A faint flush came into Georgie's face when she was told that they had come.

"Papa," she said, turning to her father, "I want to see Wattie by himself—quite alone, with no one else in the room. May I? do you mind?"

And so they all left the room, and Wattie went in alone.

What passed between them during those solemn parting moments no one ever knew; no sound came from within the room to the ears of those who stood waiting outside the door; but, after about a quarter of an hour, Wattie came out, and rushed past them blinded with tears—out at the open hall door, away down the slopes of the garden, there to work away the first anguish of his sorrow by himself.

And presently the squire went out after him. He found him lying prone at the foot of a tree, stretched along the damp grass.

"Wattie—my dear boy, my poor boy, do get up!"

The young man looked up with dim eyes, and a dazed white face; but when he saw that it was the squire, he got up.

"Can you ever forgive me?" said the old man, in a broken voice. "It was I who made her ride the mare, though you had written to warn her against her. She didn't want to ride her, but I made her; it was my cursed obstinacy—and now I have killed her—I have killed my child!"

"Don't say that, sir!" said Wattie, passing his arm within the old man's; "it is God's doing; no one was to blame; she was so good—too good to live!"

"O my boy, how I wish I had let you be engaged to her—perhaps this might never have happened," cried the squire.

"We cannot tell," answered Wattie, gravely; "at all events, such self-reproaches can avail nothing now. Come, sir, you look so ill and tired, take one turn down the garden with me—the fresh air will do you good—and tell me as we go how it all happened, for you forget that I know nothing beyond what the telegram has told me, and then we will go back to her."

So the old man leaned upon his arm, and told him all the pitiful story over again—everything from the beginning, all about Georgie's patience and goodness, and all about his own stubbornness and harshness to her. He poured out his whole heart to him, and the recital did him good.

When the two entered the house again they stopped short with one accord, and grasped each other's hands ere they went back into the sick room. Everything was forgiven between them; and from that hour to his dying day Squire Travers loved Wattie Ellison as his own son.

And after that they none of them left her room any more until the end. Towards four o'clock Georgie became very much weaker, and it soon grew evident to those around her that Mrs. Travers and Mary, who had a long cross journey, and could not possibly reach Sotherne before six o'clock, would not arrive in time to see her alive.

Dr. Ramsden came again for the second time that day, and suggested what he could to make her more comfortable; she did not suffer pain, only uneasiness; and then he was obliged to leave, promising to call again later.

It was Juliet who with gentle hands smoothed the pillows of the dying girl, and moistened her parched lips, and bathed her hot head with cooling scents. Juliet had, like many impetuous restless women, an inborn genius for nursing the sick. Her step was soft but swift, her hand gentle but firm, and her eye quick and ready to see what was wanted. Georgie often glanced up at her gratefully, as, unweariedly patient, she bent over her to minister to the hundred little requirements of a sick bed.

After a long silence, broken only by the whispers of those around her, Georgie suddenly spoke in a strong clear voice:

"Juliet!"

"Yes, darling?"

"I want you to promise me to marry Cis; it would be such a comfort to poor papa. I think it would almost make up to him for losing me. Give me your hand, Cis, and yours, Juliet; there, now say you will try and love him. I think I shall rest easier in my grave if you will say you will—it will be such a gleam of happiness by-and-by for poor papa!"

What could Juliet do?

Georgie had taken their hands—hers and her brother's, and had joined them together between her own little white ones. The one thought, poor child, in her weakened bewildered brain, half dulled already by illness and approaching death, was that something should be done to comfort her father after she was gone.

How could Juliet over that deathbed speak of her own love-troubles—troubles that, in the awful excitement of the last twenty-four hours, seemed to have faded away into absolute insignificance? How could she vex that dying girl with doubts and perplexities? What should she do?

Cis was gazing at her across the bed with big blue eyes, haggard with weeping and misery, and yet full of love and yearning to herself; and Georgie was saying over again, with the gentle impatience of those who are very ill:

"Come, Juliet, you will promise to marry him—wont you?"

And Juliet, driven to speak, and unable to speak as she ought to have done, whispered:

"Yes, Georgie dear, I will promise."

The dying girl raised the two hands she held to her lips, whilst a faint gleam of pleasure stole over her pale face. Then she

called her father to her. He half raised her up, and she rested her head upon his shoulder.

"Juliet will marry Cis, papa," she said, "and that will be a great comfort to you; now I shall die happier."

After that she never spoke again. In a little while she passed into that strange borderland of unconsciousness in which so many spend their last hours on earth.

Most awful, most solemn time of mystery, when the soul, whilst struggling to be free, hovers between earth and heaven, and the spirit, darkened and obscured, lingers still in the body it has already partially left!

Quite motionless were the watchers around her: her father supporting her head against his shoulder; her lover, with his hand fast locked in hers, kneeling by her side; little Flora, trembling and shivering with fright, close held in her brother's arms; and Juliet standing with bowed head at the foot of the bed. And old Chanticleer was by her side, watching her silently with the rest. And so, surrounded by those who loved her in life, softly and painlessly Georgie Travers's gentle spirit passed away.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WINDY WALK.

CHRISTMAS had come and gone—Christmas, the saddest day in all the year for those who have suffered and lost—sad therefore to three-fourths of the population of the Christian world; for how many in every land are those who sorrow!

January was nearly over, the crocuses and snowdrops were cropping up thickly in bright compact rows in the Dothorne flowerbeds, and down below in the valley the green grass had already grown up over Georgie Travers's grave.

Juliet Blair was wandering alone about the garden walks, with a sad wearied face. Ever since that deathbed scene she had been perplexed by the one absorbing memory of that promise which had been wrung so unwillingly from her by her dead friend.

Was not a promise to a dying person the most solemn and binding of any promise that can be given? Would not the breach of such a promise be a dire and mortal sin, provoking the wrath of Heaven to fall in curses on the faithless promiser? Was she in very truth bound to marry Cecil Travers?

She asked herself these questions over and over again a hundred times a day.

Nothing had been said to her by either Cis or his father upon the subject; but she knew well that they had not forgotten it, and she felt instinctively that they were but waiting for her to speak of it.

Juliet was very lonely in these days. Not one word had she received from that far-distant lover who had left her, as she thought, so cruelly and so heartlessly. Through Mr. Bruce she had, indeed, heard that he had arrived safely in India; and that he was well; but there had come no word to her from him. Through all these weary weeks she had pined and sickened to hear from him, and nothing had come to her day after day, except the same dead cold silence.

The conviction was forced upon her that he had treated her shamefully—that he had trifled with her—amusing himself by wounding her heart, only to fling it back to her with scorn and mockery; and that now he had utterly forgotten her! She had neither home-life nor home love to fill up the great emptiness of her heart—and Juliet was one who could not live without love.

Her stepmother she absolutely disliked, and she had not a relation in the world with whom she was even on intimate terms; whilst poor Georgie, the one friend whom she had been fond of, and who had brought affection and sympathy into her life, had been taken from her by a sudden and awful death.

Juliet wondered vaguely why she had not been killed instead of her friend. Georgie's death had brought sorrow to so many, utter desolation to her old father, and scarcely less to her young lover. Whereas, if she, Juliet, had died in her place, who would have sorrowed for her—who would even have missed her?

How dreary and empty her life was! She looked at what might be her lot, if she chose—with a husband who would assuredly love her, and whose family were prepared to welcome her with open arms; such a marriage would be better, she thought, than this utter loneliness—and since the man she cared for loved her not, why not marry Cis as well as any other?

At this point of her reflections Mrs. Blair came across the garden to join her.

"How much longer are you going to smother yourself up in that horrid crape?"

were her first words, pointing to her step-daughter's sable garments.

"Till Easter, probably," answered Juliet, coldly.

Mrs. Blair lifted her hands and eyes. "My dearest Juliet! really I think you overstrain your expression of feeling—it is not as if the poor thing had been any relation, you know."

"I have told you before," said Juliet, impatiently, "that I shall wear mourning for dear Georgia as if she had been my sister."

"Your sister! ahem! my dear—that will be great encouragement for somebody we know, wont it?" said the widow, slyly.

Juliet, with reddened cheeks, was silent for a moment, and then, with one of those sudden impulses to which she so often gave way, she said:

"You may as well know, Mrs. Blair, that I shall very probably marry Cecil Travers; so pray don't torment me any further about him."

"My darling girl!" cried her stepmother, "how charmed, how delighted I am! Pray let me congratulate you! And are you really engaged?"

"No, I am not engaged," said Juliet, withdrawing herself from the encircling arms which her stepmother had rapturously flung around her. "I am not engaged, so please don't mention it to any one, but I believe I shall be shortly, and I don't wish to speak about it again."

Here Higgs appeared on the lawn with a note for his mistress. It was from Wattie, who was staying at Broadley, and ran thus:

"MY DEAR MISS BLAIR,—It would be very kind of you if you would come over and see the squire soon. He frets after you sadly; and sometimes I hardly know what to do with him. He is so utterly broken down, that it is quite distressing to see him. Cecil has a delicacy in asking you to come over; so I ventured to write to you on my own responsibility. Yours very sincerely,
"WALTER ELLISON."

"I shall drive over to Broadley this afternoon," said Juliet, as she shut up this note and put it in her pocket; and after luncheon she started.

Things were indeed altered at Broadley House since poor Georgie's death. To begin with, the squire had given up the hounds; they had been taken by a sporting

colonel, a new-comer who had lately rented a place situated a few miles off. Every one had entreated Mr. Travers to resign them only for the season, and not to give them up altogether. Even his wife could see how utterly lost and at sea he would be without this hitherto all-absorbing occupation of his life. But the old man was obstinate. No, no, he said, he should never be fit to be a master again. By-and-by, another year perhaps, he would potter out after the hounds on his old bay horse Sunbeam, just when the meets came handy; but as to keeping the hounds again! no, that he should never do! Besides, he added pitifully, how could he, with no one to write his letters or help him with the work?

So he sat all day long in his study, doing nothing, stooping forward with bent head and clasped hands in his chair, looking as if ten years had gone over his head in as many weeks.

Flora often sat on the floor by his side, leaning against him with her story-book and Chanticleer's head on her lap; but, though he liked to have her there, and sometimes put his hand down to stroke her fair curls, she was too young to talk or be much of a companion to him.

Cis was staying at home, but, though kind and gentle in his manner to his son, the squire had no comfort in his society.

Wattie Ellison seemed the only one who could in any way rouse or interest him. When Wattie came down for a couple of nights as he did almost every week, the squire would take his arm and allow himself to be tempted out of doors round the garden, and sometimes even into the stables, and to Wattie he would talk as he could to no one else.

For hours together these two, to whom the dead girl was a living link of unflinching interest, would talk of her to each other, recalling her words and doings, and all her sweet unselfishness.

No one save Wattie, the squire felt, had ever appreciated his dead darling; her mother had snapped and scolded at her all her life; was it likely that she could sorrow for her properly now she was gone? Cis had been too much of a milksop, and Mary too cold and selfish, to understand her; Flora alone of all her sisters had been devoted to her; but the squire felt that Georgie had been more his child than any of his other children, and he was very jealous of

her memory. He would never even mention her name to any of the others save only to Wattie, who had loved her and understood her, and who sorrowed for her intensely even as he did himself.

When Juliet went over to Broadley that afternoon, Mrs. Travers met her in the doorway.

"It is very good of you to come over to such a dull house," said she, with that sort of sham self-depreciation which is so irritating because so unanswerable; "I am sure there is little enough in this house of sorrow to amuse you."

"Dear Mrs. Travers, as if I wanted amusement!" said Juliet, a little indignantly.

"Well, my dear, everything is changed here for us all, and poor Mary feels the dreadful depression very trying to her spirits. You have come to see the squire? Ah, dear me! it is sad to see him, and my dear Cis is quite unable to rouse him at all. I hope, Juliet, you will say something to give him and us all a little hope and pleasure?" she added, wistfully, for she too was anxious that her son should make this brilliant match with the rich Miss Blair.

When Juliet went into the study, and when she saw how the old man's face lighted up at her entrance, she felt quite a pang of self-reproach to think how seldom she had come over of late.

"Why, Juliet! this is kind of you; come sit down here, my dear, by the fire, and warm yourself. Is it cold out?"

"Rather; I think it is inclined to be frosty."

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed with a momentary eagerness, adding, however, immediately, with a sigh, "not that it matters to me much now!"

Juliet took the chair that he drew forward for her and began talking to him of everything she could think of to interest and amuse him, just as one talks to a child, observing pitifully the while how tottering and aged he had become, and how drawn and white his once hale and robust face had grown.

Then Wattie came in for a little while and joined in the talk, and after he had gone Juliet asked, suddenly, with something like a blush:

"And where is Cis?"

"Do you want him?" said the squire, eagerly; "dear Juliet, do you want to see him?"

And Juliet answered, "Yes, I do indeed."

The squire turned round to Flora, who was crouched up on the floor by the window with her arm round Chanticleer's neck, and told her to go and find her brother.

The child obeyed and left the room, the old hound following close at her heels as he used to at Georgie's.

"He is almost as fond of her," said the squire brokenly, looking after her, and alluding for the first time to his dead daughter.

"Yes, and she is growing so like dear Georgie; have you not noticed it? I think Flora will be a comfort to you some day, dear Mr. Travers."

The old man shook his head.

"She is a good child—a good child; but she will never be like the other," he answered, and then Cis came in.

"I have sent my carriage home, Cis," said Juliet, as she shook hands with him; "will you walk with me?"

"Juliet! do you mean it really?" cried Cis, flushing with pleasure.

"Yes, I do really," she answered, smiling, and she shook hands with the squire, and they both went out together.

For some minutes they went on side by side in silence. The fresh breeze blew briskly in their faces, as they walked quickly along, so that Cis found it difficult to keep his hat on, and was rather thankful that his companion did not speak to him. When, however, they turned out of the open park into the more sheltered lane, and Juliet still kept silence, Cis found that it was incumbent upon him to speak.

"Do you ever think of what poor Georgie said to us before she died, Juliet?" he asked, timidly.

"I am always thinking about it, Cis," answered Juliet, in her clear steady voice.

"And what do you think of doing?" he asked, nervously.

"What should you wish me to do?" said Juliet, smiling at him kindly.

"Do you mean to say—O Juliet, do you mean to say that you will marry me?" cried Cis, excitedly catching hold of both her hands, and forcing her to stand still, whilst his hat, left unsecured, took the opportunity of blowing off. Juliet laughed; it was so like the old awkward Cis of boyish days.

"Yes, Cis—that is, if you will listen first to what I have to say; let us walk on, it is too cold to stand still. Cis, before I promise you anything, I want you to know the

truth; the truth is that, though I am certainly fond of you, I do not love you as a woman ought to love her husband, and I am afraid I never shall. The reason is," she added, lowering her voice—"the reason of it is, that everything in my heart that I have had to give has been already given away."

"Juliet! to whom?" faltered Cis.

"Ah, never mind that," she answered, smiling; "I am not bound to tell you that; never mind who it was, he is never likely to cross my path or yours again; and—I don't know why I need be ashamed to say it to you—but the truth is that my affection was misplaced, for it was never returned. Well, Cis, I am leading a profitless and aimless life. I have no domestic ties and no one to love me."

"O Juliet!"

"Hush, don't interrupt me, it is quite true; I have great need of some one who will be good to me. And when I know how anxious you are to marry me, and what a great deal of comfort I should give to your poor father by doing so, and above all how I have already promised our darling Georgie on her deathbed that I would be your wife, I cannot help thinking that by giving in to the earnest wishes of you all, I shall at all events be doing some good to somebody, instead of wasting my life in selfish and profitless repinings. Cis, if you will be content to have me after this fashion, I will be your wife."

And then Cis called her by every fondest proudest name, and swore to her a dozen times that he cared not how she came to him so long as she would come, that he would spend his life in trying to prove his gratitude to her, that he had love enough for both, and that he would never expect nor exact of her more than she chose to freely give him.

"I don't quite know how we shall get on together," she said, rather dubiously, when Cis had come to an end of his rhapsodies; "I am afraid we are not very well suited to each other; but, at all events, we can try it."

It was not a very ecstatic speech for a young lady to make to the man whom she was just engaged to, certainly; but Cis was not hurt, he was too intensely delighted at being engaged to her at all to think much of the manner in which she had bound herself to him.

He was at this moment occupied in debat-

ing within himself whether it was or was not possible for him to venture to kiss her in the open high road along which they were progressing; but Juliet, who possibly suspected his intention, cut short these ambitious hopes.

"Now, Cis, go back to your father and tell him the good news; I can walk home very well from here."

"May I not walk to the door with you?" said her lover, in dismay at so abrupt a dismissal.

"No, not to-day," she answered, smiling and holding out her hand to him, and he could not do otherwise than leave her.

And Juliet walked on alone, a tall dark figure in the gathering twilight.

"If he had not left me, I should never have done it," she said to herself bitterly, ten minutes after she had parted with her affianced husband.

But in a week it was too late. In a week every man, woman and child in her native county knew of it; she had received the congratulations of half the neighborhood; and—worst, most unbreakable chain of all—she had knelt by the squire's armchair, and had been blessed and thanked, in broken trembling words, for her goodness in bringing back a gleam of pleasure and sunshine into his desolate and darkened life.

That was what bound her to Cis more securely than all her promises to him. And, to tell the truth, that was the one grain of pleasure and satisfaction she derived from her engagement.

Everything else about it revolted and horrified her; she seemed to see plainly now that the little gush of emotion and self-sacrifice which had been upon her that day had worn off; she knew how utterly unhappy such a marriage must be for her, how uncongenial poor Cis was to her in every way, and worst of all, how vain it was to hope that her heart would ever belong in the faintest degree to any one but to Hugh Fleming.

But the thought of old Squire Travers's delight, and of the pleasure which Cecil's family generally displayed at the news of his engagement, did in some measure reconcile her to it. She tried to persuade herself, and, indeed, she did honestly believe, that she was doing a good and unselfish action, and that a blessing would therefore rest upon her for it. And she had one hope left.

As soon as she was engaged she wrote to

tell Mr. Bruce, and requested him to write and inform Colonel Fleming of the fact, in order to ask for his formal consent to her marriage.

She had a wild unreasonable hope that he would come home and save her from her fate—that he would never allow her to be taken utterly away from him, never suffer her to go without a struggle to retain her. She little knew Hugh Fleming!

Two months passed away, and his answer came—in a note to Mr. Bruce, which that gentleman forwarded to her.

"MY DEAR MR. BRUCE,—I am very glad to hear such good news about Miss Blair. Pray give her my very hearty congratulations, and my sincere good wishes for her happiness; as to my consent, that, you know, is merely a matter of form, as we have talked over this subject before, and you know that I quite approved of Mr. Travers as a suitable husband for my ward. Please send me all necessary papers to sign, with your instructions. You are very kind to wish me to be present at the wedding, but that is, I fear, impossible. I should like to hear when the day is fixed.

"With kind remembrances to all, yours faithfully,
HUGH FLEMING."

That was all.

That evening when Cis came over to dinner, Juliet told him that she would keep him in suspense no longer, for that she would marry him in the month of May.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WEDDING IN MAY.

THERE was one person to whom the news of Cecil Travers's engagement came as a great shock, and that was Gretchen Rudenbach. It was in a letter from Wattle that Gretchen first heard of it, for Cecil himself was too full of his new happiness to give a thought to the poor little music-teacher in Pimlico.

When Gretchen had finished reading Wattle Ellison's letter, she laid her head down upon the tablecloth, all among her poor little breakfast array, her cup of weak tea, and her untempting-looking bread-and-butter, and cried bitterly. In the middle of these tears, in came Miss Pinkin.

Miss Pinkin wore a black front, and a tulle cap decorated with small lilac bows

and tied under her chin with white gauze ribbons, and she was enveloped in a silk shawl of an old-fashioned pattern and color, very tightly drawn around her spare figure; she had a thin angular face, and was altogether an austere-looking woman.

"Mercy me!" exclaimed this ancient virgin, lifting up both hands in amazement at the discovery of Gretchen in her woe. "What on earth are you crying your eyes out for?" Gretchen wiped her eyes, but made no answer.

"I know very well what you are crying for," continued Miss Pinkin, glancing severely at the open letter on the table. "You are crying about a piece of news that ought to give you a great deal of pleasure, if you had a well-regulated mind. I, too, have had a letter from Miss Augusta Ellison, my old pupil, and she tells me that Mr. Cecil Travers is engaged to be married to Miss Blair of Sotherne. You ought to be very much pleased, you foolish girl, instead of crying like a water-spout, and laying your head down in your bread-and-butter plate, which isn't cleanly."

Gretchen, at this well-merited reproach, lifted her head and pushed away the bread-and-butter to a safe distance.

"Because a young gentleman, far above you in station, has been kind to you when you were ill and homeless, you have been so silly as to allow your thought to dwell upon him in an indecorous manner."

"You should not say that, Miss Pinkin."

"But I must say so, Gretchen. When you were put under my charge, I determined to do my duty by you as if you were a young relative of my own. I must tell you that it is indecorous for a female to think of the other sex at all. I have never done so myself," added Miss Pinkin, virtuously drawing herself up with conscious pride. "Throughout my life I have made it a rule to myself to avoid rather than to seek the other sex; and look at me!" Gretchen did look at her, and mentally reflected that possibly the other sex had also found it more prudent to avoid than to seek that hard-featured visage. "Look at me," she continued; "honored, respected and esteemed by all gentlemen; you would wish to be so too at my age, would you not, Gretchen?"

"I should wish to be loved too," said the girl in a low voice.

"Hush, hush, my dear! I am shocked at

you!" cried Miss Pinkin, throwing up her hands. "A girl should never mention such a word in connection with gentlemen. Come, dry your eyes, and be thankful that it was only I who found you with such improper tears in them. What would people think to find you weeping over Mr. Cecil Travers's engagement? why, it would be shocking!"

"I am not ashamed of loving him," said Gretchen, with scarlet cheeks; "he is the only person in the world who has ever shown me any kindness; but for him I should have starved and died. If I did not love him, I should be a monster of ingratitude; but you make a mistake, Miss Pinkin, in thinking that I have lifted my eyes above my station. I have never dared to do so. I was crying because if he marries I shall hardly ever see him; but I am very glad to hear good news about him, and I hope he will be very happy." The last words were spoken, for all her bravery, with a little choke in them, as Gretchen prepared herself to put on her bonnet and to go out on her daily rounds. And Miss Pinkin, although she thought her words most strange and forward, and turned up her eyes in wonder at what on earth the young women of the present day were coming to, yet felt a pang of pity as she watched the girl pass out, patiently and humbly carrying her roll of music under her arm, with her sad white face bent downwards, and her eyes still swollen with tears.

Late that night, when her work was all over, and long after Miss Pinkin overhead was snoring the sonorous snores of the just, Gretchen Rudenbach sat up, by the light of her one candle, writing to the man whom she was not ashamed to own that she loved—a laborious letter, much pondered over, and all written in fine delicate German-looking characters—the only foreign things about her were her name and her handwriting—a letter in which she invoked every good gift in heaven and earth upon her benefactor, and prayed that the good God would bless him and make him happy, as he deserved to be; and then she told him that she would never forget him, however many years she might live, but always remember him morning and evening in her prayers. She told him that she knew the woman he loved must be good and beautiful, and it made her, Gretchen, glad to think how happy and proud of his love his chosen bride must be; and lastly she told him that

if ever he was sad, or sorry, or in trouble, if he would come to her, he would always find in her a devoted and faithful friend, who would at any time give her life to serve him and to comfort him.

Poor little highflown letter; yet with truth and earnestness breathing out from every line! It was written with so many prayers and tears, and with such simple devotion of a love that only asked to spend itself, and expected nothing in return!

And Cecil Travers read it with a smile, thought first he would show it to Juliet, and then, with a better feeling, decided not to show it to any one, but tore it to pieces and threw it into the fire, and then—forgot to answer it!

Meanwhile the preparations for Juliet's wedding went on apace. As it would be only six months after poor Georgie's death, it was of course, to be a very quiet affair, but still it was impossible, on an estate like Sotherne, to prevent a certain amount of feasting and rejoicing among the tenantry and laborers. A dinner for all classes in tents on the lawn, and a tenants' ball and fireworks in the evening, were unavoidable on such an occasion; and although Juliet herself would not be there, she had nevertheless all the settling and arranging to do beforehand.

And her trousseau was also, of course, in progress. Here she found an invaluable ally in her stepmother, who was quite in her element, and who was allowed to order silks, satins and laces to her heart's content.

Time went on; Juliet was too busy to be unhappy; and she was too thorough a woman not to take an interest in the hundred and one details of her wedding preparations. She wrote her orders to tradesmen, her letters to friends, her list of guests—everything, in short, that was necessary to be done—with a sort of dazed bewildered feeling of unreality running through it all. It was as if she were doing it for some one else, and not for herself. A sort of stagnation was in her heart; she was not happy, neither was she unhappy; she was simply very busy, too busy to think; and, even had she the time, there was throughout a dumb stupor in her mind, as if all her feeling, thinking powers were extinct.

This lasted till four days before her wedding, and then an event happened which taught her painfully that her capacity for suffering was as keen as ever.

A box arrived for her. It was no uncommon event, for presents from acquaintances came to her every day now. But when Higgs brought in this particular box, Juliet knew, almost before she looked at the travel-stained direction, that it came from India.

"Take it up to my room and unfasten it, Higgs," she said calmly to the man, whilst all the time her heart beat painfully.

In a few minutes she went up stairs, and locked her door. The box, with its lid off, was in the middle of the room. She knelt down in front of it; at the very top lay a note addressed to her in a large well-known handwriting. The envelop, simply directed to "Miss Blair," and without stamp or postmark, seemed to bring him very near to her; it was as if his hand had only just laid it there. With a miserable hopelessness she opened it and read:

"MY DEAR JULIET,—I send you a few trifles that I have chosen for you with great care, remembering the things you used to admire. Perhaps when this reaches you, you will be Juliet Blair no longer. May every blessing, and every joy that heaven and earth can give, be yours! In all probability I shall never meet you again, and I dare say I shall not trouble you with many letters; but I shall often think of you, dear child, oftener perhaps than you would imagine it possible. You have been a little harsh to me, Juliet. I will not blame or reproach you—you were probably full of your new happiness—it was not intentional, I know—you forgot—but O child, you might have written me *one line*—the coldest would have been less cold than your silence.

"Yours always, HUGH FLEMING."

The letter dropped from her fingers. What did he mean? how could she have written to him, who had never written to her? In what had she been harsh to him? Harsh! and to *him*, her love, her heart's darling! how could such a thing have been possible?

With set white lips, and with lines of painful bewilderment on her forehead, she knelt, staring blankly in front of her. Dimly, vaguely, there dawned upon her the possibility of the existence of some horrible misunderstanding between them; he had not forgotten her, he still thought of her with affection, and yet he accused her of forgetting, and he reproached her!—for what? Was it possible that, in spite of his

allence, his coldness, his desertion of her, he loved her even now?

But of what avail? was it not too late? With a low cry of despair she buried her face in her hands. Of what use were all her vague hopes and speculations now—now that it was too late?

Presently she roused herself to look at the contents of the box; one after the other she drew out richly-chased gold and silver ornaments, gorgeous-colored cashmeres heavy with embroidery, and rare specimens of old Oriental china. All were lovely and in excellent taste—things, as he had said, that he knew she would like; yet Juliet turned away from the glittering array with positive disgust; the spicy odor of the sandalwood shavings in which they had been packed, and which is so peculiarly Indian, made her turn sick and faint.

Why had he sent them? why had he written? Believing herself forgotten and scorned, she had been able to reconcile herself almost cheerfully to the life that was before her. But how was she to bear it, if by some dreadful incomprehensible mistake, she was to discover that he loved her, after all?

And again she puzzled and pondered, until her head ached with her thoughts, wondering what it was he meant, why he reproached her with silence and with harshness; to what did he allude? and she could in no way understand or answer these questions to herself.

There is an old superstition, of which probably on this occasion both bride and bridegroom were unaware, that a marriage in the "Virgin's month," the month of May, is unlucky. And, certainly, the weather, to begin with, appeared anxious to carry out the old saying.

The 20th of May, Juliet Blair's wedding-day, was ushered in with a fine cheerless drizzle which by nine o'clock had settled down into a steady downpour.

Nevertheless, at as early an hour as five in the morning, a small person, cloaked and bonneted, and bearing a waterproof, an umbrella, and a little handbag containing a parcel of roughly-cut sandwiches and some gingerbread nuts, came creeping cautiously down the staircase of a certain house in Pimlico.

At an angle of the stairs a door suddenly flew open, and an awful apparition—Miss Pinkin in her nightgown, with a frilled nightcap, and minus the black front—

stood in a threatening attitude upon the landing.

"Merciful heavens! what on earth are you doing? where in the name of common sense are you going at five o'clock in the morning, disturbing honest folk in their beds? have you lost your wits, Gretchen Rudenbach?"

"I am going out," answered that damsel, humbly, yet with a sort of doggedness which quiet-mannered people often evince.

"Going out! at five o'clock! are you going to climb the lampposts to put out the gaslights, pray?" which sneering display of ignorance concerning the habits of the London lamplighter caused Miss Rudenbach to smile.

"No, I am going to spend the day in the country, Miss Pinkin; don't keep me standing here—I shall lose my train."

"Where are you going, may I ask?" And every frill on Miss Pinkin's nightcap seemed to stand erect with outraged virtue.

"To see a friend," answered the girl, defiantly.

"Humph!" snorted Miss Pinkin; "you'll come to harm, as sure as my name is Sarah Anne Pinkin. I wash my hands of you. A friend, indeed! as if I didn't know where you are going! Go your own way. You'll come to harm, mark my words!" And shaking a warning finger at her refractory lodger, Miss Pinkin flounced back into the privacy of her bedroom.

Gretchen crept out alone into the deserted streets—to find a cheerless leaden sky, that harmonized well with the girl's own sad thoughts, and wet muddy pavements, through which her ill-made boots splashed laboriously as she plodded along them. At so early an hour neither cabs nor omnibuses were stirring, and Gretchen had come out prepared to walk to the station. Her way lay across Hyde Park. The path was wet and sloppy; the wind drove the fine gray drizzle straight into her face, and blew her shabby little black bonnet off her head; and she had a difficulty in keeping up her umbrella. As she struggled painfully along, a solitary figure, coming from the opposite direction, passed her half-way in the middle of the Park.

Passed, and then looked back at her, and with a start recognized her.

"You! Gretchen!"

"Yes, it is I," said Gretchen, shrinking a little aside as David Anderson's honest

but rough face peered down under her umbrella.

"But where on earth are you going at this hour?"

"I am going to the station to catch an early train; please don't stop me, I have no time to lose," she answered, irritably, and hurrying on; but David Anderson kept pace beside her.

"I cannot let you walk alone; I will go with you," he said, gently taking her bag out of her hand, and steadying the fluttering umbrella over her head with his stronger hand.

"Where are you going?"

"I am going into the country to spend the day; if I were to ask you so many questions, you would not like it. Pray, where are you going, and where did you come from?"

David Anderson, who, truth to tell, was coming home in the early morning from a very late and very riotous party at the lodgings of a friend, a late member of the now-dispersed "Melodious Minstrels" society, found the questions somewhat difficult to answer, and walked along by her side in snubbed silence.

How Gretchen hated this enforced companionship! There was a time when she had been almost fond of David Anderson; but of late she had learned to regard him with aversion and disgust. She looked at him through Cecil Travers's eyes; she remembered that Cis had called him underbred, a snob and a boor, and that he had made her promise that she would never be so foolish as to throw herself away upon a man so thoroughly inferior to herself. On arriving at the Great Western Terminus, Gretchen insisted upon taking her ticket herself, while she had sent David away to secure a place for her in a second-class carriage. She did not want him to know where she was bound.

Poor David lingered ruefully by the carriage door till the train went off, hoping in vain for some kind word of thanks that would repay him for his wet walk; but Gretchen only gave him a careless nod as she was carried off, and the great rough fellow turned away with a deep sigh and something very like tears in his eyes.

It was the old story of cross-purposes everywhere. Elinor is in love with Charles, who does not even know it, but is sighing out his soul for Lady Blanche, who is as

far above his reach as the moon, and who, moreover, nourishes a secret affection for young Dandy in the Guards, whilst that young gentleman, cruelly careless of the girl he might have for the asking, is passionately and hopelessly smitten with pretty Mrs. Lowndes, who has four children and a prosy husband, and who snubs young Dandy heartlessly, being herself bent upon the fascination of some one else; and so on—the wrong man is forever pairing off with the wrong woman, till one is tempted to look upon the whole well-worn subject of love and its delights as the creation of a few highflown and ignorant poetical gentlemen, and to ask, if it be indeed true that "marriages are made in heaven," why it is that, being confessedly for the most part such utter failures, the unconscious victims of these unsuccessful arrangements above are not allowed a readjustment of matters on earth? What a game of puss-in-the-corner we should have, to be sure!

"Can you tell me the way to Sotherne Church, please?" asks Gretchen of the porter, as she is landed shivering in the rain on the little wayside station platform, and the train that has brought her disappears slowly in the distance.

"Straight on, miss,"—when does any one give one any other direction to find one's way than that inevitable "straight on?"—"straight on as far as you can see, and you'll come to the church; it will be wet walking for you, miss," added the man, softened, perhaps, by the pretty gentle face and the big sad blue eyes.

The road, of course, was anything but "straight;" it wound about like a serpent between its wet green hedges, and there were innumerable cross-roads intersecting it in every direction, so that Gretchen had to ask several times, and had some difficulty in finding her way. Eventually, however, after about two miles' walk along the slopiest and wettest of country lanes, she arrived at the village and the church.

Even at this early hour—it was but nine o'clock—it was evident that some unusual event was about to happen. The place was all astir, several triumphant arches of greenery had been erected across the road, and the village carpenters were still at work tying up the last branch of lilac, and tin-tacking securely the last breadth of bunting. Flags were flying from the public-houses and principal houses in the village, whilst

the inhabitants in their Sunday clothes stood about in groups talking eagerly and excitedly of the coming festivities. The church doors were wide open, and Gretchen entered unmolested and took up her position in a sheltered nook close to the door, behind a stone pillar.

Some women were laying red cloth down the aisle, and presently, with a little commotion, the vicar's bustling little wife came in with a big basket of flowers on her arm, with which she proceeded to decorate the altar.

Gretchen watched her with greedy eyes. What would she not have given to help her! she had a half-thought of going forward to offer her assistance; but shyness and prudence kept her back.

As Mrs. Dawson passed down the church again, she glanced sharply at the girl sitting alone, half-concealed behind the pillar. She knew every woman and girl in the parish of Sotherne, and in most of the parishes round, and Gretchen's face was strange to her; besides, she evidently belonged to a better class than any of the farmers' daughters about. Gretchen blushed deeply as she felt herself the object of such close scrutiny; and as she noticed the blush on the pretty delicate features, and the downcast blue eyes, and the bent smooth brown head, with its poor but perfectly lady-like covering, something of the real state of the case flashed through the mind of the clergyman's wife.

"Come down from town by the first train to see Cis Travers married!" was her mental reflection. "Well, men are wretches, but I did think Cis Travers was too soft for that kind of thing—he is not half good enough for Juliet in any way, and now it appears he has not even been devoted to her! It all comes of his father's letting him be knocking about London so long by himself; it's a shocking bad thing for boys"—with a rapid thought of her own stalwart sons. "I shall be careful not to let Tom and Charlie be turned out in London with nothing to do. Poor girl!" added the vicar's wife to herself, pityingly, as she trudged rapidly down the churchyard path to the vicarage gate; "she looked modest and gentle enough; I dare say he has made her very unhappy—the wretch! Well, I don't think I shall say anything about it to the vicar; he would be wanting to come out and reclaim her before breakfast, and that would

make us all late; and besides, he would be sure to call her 'brazen woman,' or 'daughter of sin,' or some horribly coarse name to her face, and that would do more harm than good: good men are so hard on women! and they never have any discrimination to distinguish between the vicious and the unfortunate—no. I will say nothing about it; besides, I really know nothing, it is only my own suspicions." So saying, good little Mrs. Dawson, who, like many—alas, not most!—Christian women, had all a woman's tenderness towards a sorrowing fellow-woman, from whatever source her sorrows might come, shook off her wet cloak and stamped her muddy little toes in the vicarage porch, and went in to pour out her husband's tea, with never a word to that excellent but somewhat severe divine about the little strange girl who sat shivering in the church hard by, and who seemed to Mrs. Dawson's eyes to be the living impersonation of Cis Travers's London wickednesses—wickednesses of which you and I, my reader, know him to be guiltless.

I am not going to describe Juliet Blair's wedding. Weddings are but dismal things at best, and if any one has a partiality for reading detailed accounts of them, of the demeanor and aspect of the "blushing bride," of the elaborate costumes of herself and her bridesmaids, and her friends' presents on the interesting occasion, they have but to study the last "Court Journal," where such scenes are weekly set forth in far better language and with far more knowledge of the subject than I should be at all likely to display.

Juliet Blair's wedding was exactly like any one else's. There was the same fluttering in of well-dressed wedding guests, bustling backwards and forwards in and out of the pews to exchange whispered greetings with each other. The same gathering of prettily dressed and moderately good-looking bridesmaids at the bottom of the church. The same awkward interval of suspense whilst the bride was anxiously awaited, during which Cis stood first on one leg, then on the other, and gnawed nervously at the ends of his straw-colored kid gloves in the same helpless-looking way that every bridegroom invariably does, suggesting irresistibly the idea that, but for the best man—in this case, a very young Oxford friend—he must inevitably turn and flee. The best man, with a big buttonhole

flower, looks jaunty and self-important, as if the success of the whole ceremony depended mainly upon his exertions, although a passing thought of the speech which he will have to make by-and-by sends an occasional cold shudder down his back. Then the bride comes in on Sir George Ellison's arm, for, as she has no near relative, he, as an old friend of her father's, is to give her away. And there is the same scuffle of everybody getting into their places that always happens, and the ceremony proceeds with the same snuffles and snuffles from that female portion of the spectators who are invariably affected to tears without any known cause on such occasions.

There was nothing at all peculiar or striking in Juliet Blair's wedding; but to Gretchen Rudenbach, craning forward and straining her eyes and ears to catch every sight and every sound, it was a wedding different from every other wedding.

Presently the organ burst joyfully into the Wedding March, and the bride and bridegroom came down the aisle together, the school children flung flowers down be-

fore them as they came, and Gretchen pressed forward with the rest. Down at the bridegroom's feet there fell a little bunch of dillies of the valley that only last night had been fastened together in Covent Garden Market, and the next moment they were crushed—poor innocent white blossoms!—beneath his heel.

And looking at his wife's face, cold, impassive, and almost despairing, Cis Travers, with a start, caught sight of a face beyond it, eager, yearning, wet with tears, and quivering with emotion, and in that moment the young bridegroom felt vaguely which it was of these two women that loved him best.

In another second Gretchen had shrunk back into her sheltering corner, and Cis was tucking his wife's white satin train into the carriage; whilst she, with her heart on the other side of the world, was saying to herself:

"It is too late, now—too late! O Hugh! O my darling, why did you ever leave me?"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

VERA'S REVENGE.

BY MISS ELLIS CLARE.

CHAPTER I.

Erleswood, like all small towns, was very exclusive, very satirical, and very hard to please. The inhabitants formed themselves into cliques, and to admit a member from an inferior clique into one's own was fatal in the eyes of Erleswood. Moreover, every act, however small, was magnified, and, in passing from mouth to mouth, lost not one tittle in the telling; indeed so metamorphosed was the tale that, if by chance it reached the ears of the delinquent again, he or she passed it by with supreme contempt, not understanding or believing that it could relate to them.

Such was the state of things when Brenda Mortlock and her mother came to live at Erleswood.

Brenda was an only child, and her mother's pet and darling. Mrs. Mortlock took up her abode in Erleswood, thinking that it would be pleasanter for her child to have the companionship of her cousins—for Mrs. Graham, Mrs. Mortlock's sister, lived at the Priory. But speedily did she discover her mistake. Mrs. Graham looked very coldly on Brenda's bright face, and innocent, winning ways, and her daughter Vera scarcely condescended to notice her at all; and, had it not been for the fact that she had attracted the attention of Lady Fitzroy of Erle's Court, poor Brenda would have been a complete alien. But Lady Fitzroy took a great liking to the simple girl, whose manners were so unaffected and different from those of the Erleswood girls in general, who vied one with the other in courting the good graces of the lady of Erle's Court.

When Vera heard that Brenda had been invited to spend a day up at the court, she shrugged her shoulders, and raised her eyebrows scornfully.

"What curious tastes people have!" she remarked. "But Lady Fitzroy always was peculiar, although she is very charming and pleasant."

Yet all Vera's unkind speeches and wishes did not hinder her cousin from spending a very happy day.

Launcelot Willet, Lady Fitzroy's brother,

took a strange fancy to the naive, pretty girl, who made no secret of her admiration at all the grandeur she saw, and who yet was a perfect lady from the top of her golden-brown head to the sole of her dainty little foot.

"She is perfection in her way, Leonore," he said to his sister.

"Yes, she is a sweet little bairn," assented the lady. Then, as the young man made no further remark, she came forward to the recess from which he was looking out lazily at the star-studded heavens. "But don't lose your heart to her, Launcelot," she added, laughingly.

"No fear of that," he answered, merrily. "Such a catastrophe as that can never occur. I have no heart to lose, sister mine. But, if I could love, why might I not choose this simple little lily as well as one of the wild-flowers of Erleswood?"

"Heaven forbid that you should do that!" she cried. "There is not a girl in the whole of Erleswood worthy to be my brother's bride."

"I scarcely think they are of your opinion," laughed the young man, a trifle conceitedly.

"No, verily—they take but small pains to hide from you that you have but to ask to have. But you would never wed one of them, Launcelot?"—questioningly.

He stooped over her and kissed her pale cheek.

"Have no fear, darling sister. I was not made for love or marriage. I have no wish for one or the other. And your little wood-violet is no more likely to win my heart than her gayer but less modest companions. I am doomed to a bachelor's life, Leonore. You will have to put up with me for a long time yet, dear."

The lady looked lovingly at him.

"I should be selfish to wish and be foolish to expect that I could keep you with me always, Launcelot," she murmured, "but my life you cannot but suppose would be very dull without you."

Lady Fitzroy was a widow with one bright, beautiful boy of six years. Her husband had fallen on the battle-field; and

from the day when he broke the sad news to his sister, Launcelot Willet had never left her. But grief did not make Lady Fitzroy selfish; and, although she mingled but little in the gayeties of Erleswood herself, she threw open her park and house to its inhabitants once every year, and "my lady's" garden-party was the one theme that engrossed the thoughts of the fair maidens—and of their mothers also—for many weeks beforehand.

Launcelot Willet was one of the handsomest men for miles round, gentlemanly and rich. What wonder then that mothers sighed as they looked at their marriageable daughters, and wished that his eyes could be opened to their numberless charms?

CHAPTER II.

"Brenda, is it not time to change your dress, dear child?"

At the sound of her mother's voice Brenda roused herself from the revery into which she had fallen.

"Yes, mamma darling;" then, glancing at the clock—"What can I have been thinking of? It is half-past three, and I ought to be at the archery-ground now;" and she hastened away.

Mrs. Mortlock's eyes followed her fondly, and a little smile of triumph lit up her face as she fervently hoped that Vera, haughty, domineering Vera, might be unsuccessful, and her own little Brenda win the prize; for on this day was the contest at the Erleswood Archery Club, and an emerald-studded sheaf of arrows for brooch, and bows for ear-rings, were to be given to the "best shot."

Brenda was fond of archery, and had practiced it when at school. She had been anxious to join this club; but dissenting voices had arisen, and Vera, who was one of the principal members, had said most decidedly that she was not to be admitted. In her frank outspoken way Brenda had spoken of her disappointment to Lady Fitzroy; and by some means—Brenda never knew how—she had received a note enrolling her among the members. Unfeignedly delighted was the girl; and, believing that Vera had reconsidered her decision, she had thanked her in her own pretty, fervent way. Vera had received her gratitude with a cold smile, but had said not a word that could lead Brenda to suppose that her influence had

not been used for the desired end. But the fact of the matter was that Lady Fitzroy, annoyed at the exclusiveness of the Erleswood girls, had made it a favor to herself that Brenda should be admitted—and of course she was not denied. And now the grand day was come, and Brenda tripped back to her mother's side and kissed her fondly ere she started.

"Why do we not commence?" asked Vera Graham, impatiently.

"All the members are not here," replied a gentleman by her side.

"Who is missing?" asked the girl.

"Your cousin, Miss Mortlock."

"Oh, she is never punctual!" asserted Vera, pettishly. "But I don't see why we need wait for her; she is a new member, and scarcely likely to win the prize."

"But it would be extremely unfair to give her no chance of so doing," put in another voice; and Vera crimsoned with rage as Launcelot Willet thus expressed his opinion, and almost immediately afterward sauntered over the grass to join Brenda as she came rapidly toward them.

"I am afraid I am dreadfully late," she began, breathlessly.

"Never mind," said the young man; "don't hurry, or your hand will be unsteady."

"Oh, I am not likely to do any wonders!" she cried, smilingly. "Vera is the best 'shot' here—much better than any one else, unless it is Margaret Sinclair. She shoots very well sometimes, but she is uncertain."

Launcelot Willet smiled encouragingly. He was by no means sure that either Vera Graham or Margaret Sinclair would win the prize.

Vera could not disguise her mortification when Brenda, escorted by her companion, came up to her.

"Brenda," she said, angrily, "it is in very bad taste for the newest member to come so late! But some people never can learn etiquette!" she added, spitefully.

A hot flush rose to the girl's cheeks, and she turned a distressed look on Launcelot, who inwardly fumed, though he wisely said nothing; but he constituted himself her cavalier for the afternoon, standing by her and handing her the arrows.

When the first round was over, Vera turned with a mocking bow to her cousin.

"What luck!" she said. "We are exactly equal so far."

Brenda smiled gladly. She would have been delighted to win the prize, but she never for a moment believed such a feat possible. In almost total silence the second round was shot, and then Vera exclaimed, with a slight quiver of her under lip—

"Your good genius must surely be watching over you, Brenda, for you have actually scored one more than I have."

"Perhaps your hand is not steady," hazarded Brenda, who was astonished at her own good luck.

"I don't know why it should not be," retorted her cousin, sharply.

The fact of the matter was that, although, strictly speaking, Vera had a far better aim than Brenda, she was so thoroughly out of temper, and so annoyed to see how all Launcelot Willet's attentions were monopolized, that her hand shook from simple rage and vexation. In the last round her arrows flew wide of the mark.

Taking sure and steady aim, Brenda, emboldened by success, shot her last arrow right into the bull's eye. She had won. Congratulations followed from the gentlemen standing round, while wonder was depicted on the faces of the ladies. Vera, throwing her bow away, walked up to her, saying, in a voice that shook with anger—

"Well, I hope you are satisfied?"

"Indeed I am," replied the girl, simply. "I never expected to shoot so well, but it is chiefly owing to my steady practice"—with a grateful glance at Launcelot.

To the surprise of the bystanders, and the vexation of Vera, the young man replied—

"I assure you, Miss Mortlock, it has been a great pleasure to me to practice with you."

"So you practiced together, did you?" asked Vera, suppressed irony and anger in her tone. "Then that accounts for it. I did not think you were so mean and sly, Brenda."

"Oh, I am not, Vera!" replied the girl, in real distress. "We may all practice at our own homes as much as we like. Is it not so?"—appealing to one or two of the competitors. "Of course, if I have transgressed any of the rules, I must forfeit the prize," she added, wistfully.

"The prize is rightly yours, Miss Mortlock," said Launcelot, soothingly. "Miss Graham, will you please look at rule nine? 'That any of the members may practice where they please within two days of the contest, except on the archery-ground it-

self'? And that we certainly never did—did we, Miss Mortlock?"

But all Brenda's pleasure in her conquest was gone. She had mortally offended her cousin, and all the ladies looked coldly on her. If she could have known how pretty she looked at that moment, in her tight-fitting costume adopted by the club, with her golden hair coiled round her head beneath the little green velvet hat, perhaps she would not have been so surprised. Jealousy formed not a small portion of the dislike that rankled in the breasts of the non-successful competitors. Lady Fitzroy presented the prize, which was given by the mayor and corporation of the town. When the fortunate candidate was brought before her, she looked up in some surprise.

"My dear," she said, kindly, "I never thought you had any chance, but I am not the less pleased that you have won." And she fastened the gold brooch studded with emeralds into the lace ruffle round the girl's neck, and looped the ear-rings into her ears, and then she kissed the sweet blushing face as Brenda answered—

"O Lady Fitzroy, I am sure it was luck! I did not deserve it a bit. Vera shoots so much better than I do generally."

Right glad was Lady Fitzroy, for she knew that Vera was bad-tempered, proud, and jealous of her pretty cousin, and she believed that Brenda deserved the prize. If she had known how Launcelot hovered round Brenda all that afternoon, it might have caused her a qualm of uneasiness, but she did not guess it, and he was strangely reticent on the subject after they returned to Erle's Court.

But Vera could not forget her vexation and mortification, and Brenda heard of gayeties going on at the Priory to which she was not invited, and she sighed, for she was young and loved pleasure.

CHAPTER III.

"Leonore, when are we to have our garden-party?" It had been a hot, sultry day, and the evening air came in refreshingly cool and sweet through the open windows, wafting in the scent of roses and briars; and Launcelot lazily pulled down a bunch of Guelder roses as he asked the question.

"Some time this month," replied Lady Fitzroy, from her couch.

"Leonore, I will tell you what I have

been thinking would be a great deal nicer than a garden-party."

"What is that?" questioned his sister, curiously.

"A picnic to some pretty place. We might all go in wagonettes and carriages, and drive back late at night; it would be glorious!" he cried, as a vision rose before him of Brenda sitting by his side as they drove through the moonlit lanes. It was a pleasant thought, and he energetically threw his roses away and strolled over to where his sister lay. "What do you say, Leonore?" he asked. "Would it not be nicer?"

"Well, I scarcely know," she made reply; "it would be a very fatiguing day. I think our garden-party has always been enjoyable, so I don't see why we should put aside the old plan."

"As you like," he replied, carelessly, "but I am sure every one would enjoy a picnic much more than a garden-party. I know I should."

"In that case," said his sister, "we will have the picnic by all means." And so it was arranged, and a day fixed in the following week.

Launcelot stood by his study window that evening, long after his sister had retired for the night, and gazed out into the darkness, while a curious light shone on his features as he murmured—

"O Brenda, Brenda, how strangely dear you have grown to me! And once I thought I had no heart to give to any one—I fancied I had buried all that long ago; but it has sprung into new life, ennobled and intensified, and—I love you, my pretty little blossom!"

"O mamma dear, I am wild at the idea of going!" cried Brenda. "Will the time never pass? It must be ten o'clock."

"It is only twenty minutes past nine; you would get up early, you know, child," returned Mrs. Mortlock.

"But I could not sleep," said the girl, opening her large eyes. "I dreamt about going, and when I awoke I could not go to sleep again."

Mrs. Mortlock smiled. Although she took no part in gayety herself, she could remember how much she would once have enjoyed such a day, and did not seek to check her daughter's delight. Mrs. Mortlock knew how much enjoyment lies in anticipation; and as she watched Brenda's sweet

face the mother's heart yearned toward her darling.

At length the hour struck, and Brenda threw a scarlet shawl over her white dress, and stooped over her mother to bid her good-by. Mrs. Fortescue had promised to take her under her protection, and her carriage was already at the door; so, with a whispered injunction to take care of herself, Mrs. Mortlock pressed a fond kiss on the girl's soft cheek. In high spirits was Brenda; her eyes sparkled and her heart beat as she and Mrs. Fortescue neared the lodge gates. In a few moments more they stopped before the flight of stone steps leading to *Erle's Court*.

Brenda had not been many minutes in the large drawing-room before Launcelot spied her. His face brightened as he approached.

"Miss Mortlock, I am going in my dog-cart. I wonder if you would like to go with me?"

Would she like it? Dim forebodings as to the propriety of so doing flashed across her mind; but these were speedily put to flight as Launcelot added—

"My sister has no objection, if you will consent."

"Oh, I should enjoy it so much!"

And so it chanced that when Vera, resplendent in an elaborate costume of gray and pink, was assisted into the wagonette, she beheld to her mortification Brenda's bright sparkling face lifted to her companion's, as Launcelot's gray mare trotted out on to the high-road.

"I never met such a forward girl in my life," cried Vera, to her mother; "she is always pushing herself where she is not wanted."

But Brenda was wanted. There were few things that Launcelot Willet had ever enjoyed more than that sunny drive between the rose-crowned hedges, along the woodbine-scented lanes, his fair companion raising her sweet flushed face ever and anon as she gayly chatted away.

"I am afraid Mrs. Fortescue will not like my coming alone with you," she remarked at length.

"You are not bound to give an account to her, are you?" asked the young man, carelessly.

"No, not exactly; but you see mamma left me in her charge."

"And don't you think I am quite as capable of taking care of you?" asked Launce-

lot, bending down and admiring the deep color that came and went in her cheeks.

"Oh, yes, I do not doubt that!" she replied, with a quick upward glance, and a burning blush as she met his half-quizzical glance of admiration. "But"—

"But what? Now, Brenda, don't you be a fine lady with all manner of fancies to prevent your enjoyment."

Brenda! He had never called her so before; and her name had sounded so sweet as now that it fell from his lips.

"And I mean to bring you back again too," he added—"yes, in spite of all the Mrs. Fortescues in creation."

She did not demur. She only hoped he would gain his point. At present the drive was very delightful; but would it not be a thousand times more so in the cool, quiet moonlight?

All pleasant things sooner or later come to an end; and so did Brenda's drive. When she and Launcelot reached Welton Vale they found the rest of the company assembled, and dark looks and angry glances greeted the happy girl as she took her place among them.

"Upon my word, Brenda," sneered Vera, "I should think Mr. Willet must be disgusted with you. Actually to ride sixteen miles alone with a man you know little or nothing of! Of course he can but put it down to one thing, and believe that you are in love with him, and are angling for his riches and position. I know his opinion of fortune-hunters, for I heard what he once said to mamma about them."

A hot blush rose to Brenda's cheeks and tears filled her eyes. Had she been unmaidenly? Had she done wrong by coming? How delightful it had all been! But, oh, he surely could not think such cruel things of her! Vera said he had a contempt for girls who showed their love for him—and she must have done this; for if she had not liked him very much she would never have let him drive her. The tears dropped one by one on her clasped hands. What must he think of her? Vera knew more of the world than she did, and she had said nothing would have tempted her to do such a thing. How Brenda wished she had never come! Her heart was full to overflowing; she had committed a terrible breach of etiquette, and Launcelot would think her bold and unmaidenly. She crept in between Mrs. Fortescue and her daughter, wishing

that she could hide herself from every eye, for what must they all think of her? Presently Launcelot, missing his little companion, came to seek her, and found her with a sad little face, listening patiently to Mrs. Fortescue's tales of how things were done when she was a girl.

"Brenda, you look bored. Come with me," he whispered, stooping over her.

A light sprang into her eyes for a moment—a glad wistful light—and she half rose; then, remembering all her cousin had said, she sank back on the green turf again.

"No, thank you, Mr. Willet. I am very comfortable here."

But Brenda's little attempt at dignity was lost upon Launcelot. He guessed in a moment how things really were.

"How horribly jealous the Erleswood girls are!" he thought as he moved away. "They have been scolding her for driving with me, I'd bet any sum. Poor little girl, it's a shame! However it is of no use to make a scene here. I'll get her out of their clutches as soon as I can;" and he devoted himself to others of the company, while Brenda sat apart, her small oval face growing white and sad, and a shadow dimming the brightness of her brown eyes.

After luncheon there was a general discussion as to what places were worth seeing. The two principal objects of interest appeared to be some famous ruins two miles off, and a very curious old church about the same distance in the opposite direction.

"We shall not have time to visit both places," said Lady Fitzroy, "so our best plan will be to divide into two parties, one of which will go to the ruins, and the other to the Abbey church."

Brenda shrank from joining Launcelot's party, keeping close to Mrs. Fortescue, and declaring that she would much rather see the church. Not so Vera. From the first she had determined to go to the ruins under the escort of Launcelot Willet; but, divining her intention, he invited as many ladies as seemed disposed to go, and turned away without so much as asking Miss Graham which she preferred. Vera's heart swelled with anger at the omission, for that it was intentional she never for a moment supposed. The fact was, he had taken a thorough dislike to the haughty, jealous girl, and, bitterly chagrined at Brenda's refusal to accompany him, he somehow connected it with her cousin, believing that she had

reproved and scolded Brenda for having absented herself from the rest of the party that morning, and that the poor little girl had taken it to heart.

It was a long walk to the church, and Brenda was very tired. She missed Launcelot's cheery tones and merry laughter, and, remembering how dark his face had grown when she refused to go with him, her heart ached, for she feared he was angry with her. Poor little Brenda! It was a day of misfortunes for her. At length the party reached their destination, and, worn out, she threw herself on the grass, declaring she could go no further.

Vera smiled scornfully as she passed by.

"How affected you are, Brenda! I suppose you are not more tired than the rest of us."

Brenda started up, stung by the sneer, and followed the rest of the party into the church. It was a magnificent edifice, "well worth the trouble of coming to see," said Brenda to herself, as she wandered from one chapel into another, pausing here and there to read a curious inscription, or to try to decipher the meaning of the stained-glass windows. Peering curiously about, she discovered a little flight of steps which led to an old room in the wall, filled with ancient volumes fastened by chains. They were strangely mildewed and yellow, but invaluable, the old verger told them, and Brenda handled them reverently. There was not much here to interest the rest of the party, and they stumbled down the stairs again, sauntering out by twos and threes into the churchyard. Brenda followed them wistfully. She would like to have examined those old manuscripts and volumes much longer. They had almost all left the church save Vera, and she sat by the organ, lazily striking a note here and there.

"O Vera," cried her cousin, "are you going to play? I do so want to look at those books again. If I go up, will you call when you have finished?"

Vera looked at her curiously.

"You are an odd girl," she said. "Yes, I will call you; but I dare say I shall be only a few minutes. What can you find to interest you in that musty old room?"

But Brenda was already half-way up the staircase, and Vera played one after another of Mendelssohn's *lieder*. The melody rang through the aisles, making sweet echoes around her. She was a splendid musician,

and money had not been spared to give her every advantage. Brenda believed Vera would be absorbed for a good half-hour when once she was seated at her beloved organ, and relying on her promise to summon her, leisurely examined the curious things around her—large blocks of stone that had fallen from very various parts of the building, pieces of carving, grotesque figures and fancies. Suddenly perceiving how dusky it was growing, she started up, and ran down the steps.

"Vera!" she cried; but no one answered. "Vera!" and Brenda stood petrified, for the organ was closed, and not a human being was in the church. She ran to the door, but it was close locked.

A great dread fell upon the girl. She had been left behind, and perhaps might have to spend the night there. As this awful thought presented itself, she burst into tears and uncontrollable sobbing; but the echoes resounded so fearfully that she hushed her weeping. To her excited imagination it seemed that myriad spirit-tongues were mocking her woe.

"What am I to do?" she moaned, wringing her hands. "I dare not stay here by myself. Oh, I could not; it all looks so weird and ghostly!"

The shadows deepened around her, bathing everything in a great gloom, from which the pillars and statues gleamed forth, white and fearful to behold. Brenda shuddered and hid her face in her hands. What could she do? Perhaps they would find she was missing, and come to seek her; but, if not—"I think I should die before morning!" cried the poor child. And then she opened one of the heavy pew doors, and crouched down in a corner, laying her head against the crimson cushions, and hiding her face 'that she might not see what looked so mysterious and solemn about her.

From first to last what a day of disasters it had been! She had paid dearly for her drive with Launcelot Willet. Launcelot! A flood of joy rushed to her heart. He surely would miss her? Ah, no! For she remembered hearing Lady Fitzroy say that, if her brother and his party arrived first at the place of rendezvous, they were not to wait for the others, but to start at once. So, believing her to be with the others, he would of course do so. Heaven help her! For she saw no prospect of escape. And, as she had imagined, so it was.

Vexed and hurt by Brenda's assumed indifference, Launcelot with his party started before the others arrived, and the place of honor by his side was vacant, for, remembering how he had looked forward to that moonlit drive, Launcelot could not bring himself to ask any other to fill it—so, moody and silent, he drove home alone. If any of Lady Fitzroy's party missed Brenda, they supposed she was in one of the other wagonettes, and no one for a moment dreamt that she had been left behind. When they reached Erle's Court, to the surprise of every one, instead of dismissing her guests, Lady Fitzroy asked them to remain, telling them that her brother thought it would be a pleasant ending to the day to have a little dance. Nothing loath, they all complied, and Lady Fitzroy, worn out with the unusual fatigue, went indoors to rest. As she lay on a couch by the open window, watching the dancers amid the trees, Launcelot strode into the room.

"Leonore"—and his voice was harsh and full of pain—"where is Brenda Mortlock?"

"Miss Mortlock?" replied his sister, in unfeigned surprise. "I don't know, dear. Is she not on the lawn with the others?"

"No—and not one of them knows where she is. Miss Graham says she was in the wagonette with Mrs. Fortescue, but, when I asked the lady if that was the case, she declared she had never seen her since they left the church. Can she have been left behind?" Great drops of perspiration broke out on the young man's brow as he asked the question. The thought of gentle Brenda shut up in that ghostly church nearly maddened him. Then he rose.

"Where are you going, Launcelot?" his sister asked.

"Where am I going? To seek her—my little Brenda! Life would not be worth living without her; for, O Leonore! I love her as I never dreamed I could love!"

"I feared this," said Lady Fitzroy, bending her head.

"Why should you fear it?" he asked, impetuously. "Is she not lovely and modest, and all that a true woman should be? But the moments are flying—I must not linger;" and he quickly left the room.

Lady Fitzroy pressed her hand over her eyes. Then this was to be the end of it! He had lost his heart to this little country girl, and would marry her. She chided herself for her selfishness, and yet no one but

she could know how blank and desolate the future would be without Launcelot.

With his face white and set, Launcelot Willet galloped over the road to Welton Vale. His horse's hoofs rang on the ground with a cheery sound, while his heart beat high with mingled fear, hope, and love.

CHAPTER IV.

Brenda had almost fallen asleep, worn out with her tears and her misery, when she started up, wide awake in a moment, for surely she heard a distant sound of a door opening. What new trouble was there in store? Ah, yes, the door was creaking loudly, and surely opening, and some one or some thing was coming up the long aisle! What or who could it be? One moment's strained and terrified gaze, every nerve quivering with suspense, and Brenda uttered a wild cry of joy as she fell into Launcelot's arms.

Angry feelings swelled the young man's heart as he looked down on the trembling little figure, the pretty white muslin dress all crumpled, dusty, and torn, the Dolly Varden hat crushed out of all likeness to the coquettish little erection that had crowned her brown hair that morning.

"Brenda, my darling, how did this happen?" And then she told her tale—how that she had asked Vera to let her know when she had finished at the organ, and she supposed she must have forgotten, for she went away without her—and, oh, she had been so frightened! She knew it was silly, but she could not help it—nothing could really have hurt her, could it?—with a half-sob.

"And you were unhappy as well, little one?" said the young man. "Your cousin had told you that you had acted very wrongly in coming with me in the morning, and so you resolved to behave better in future, bearing bravely the pain it would give you. Was it not so?"

"How did you know? Who told you?" asked Brenda, innocently.

And then he gathered her close to him.

"Brenda, give me the right to watch over you always," he said; and she looked up radiantly into his handsome face, and did not say him nay.

So the day that had dawned so brightly, and then had changed to thunder-clouds, ended in brilliant sunshine, and Brenda was happy at last.

VERONICA.

BY BLANCHE SHAW.

The November sun fell aslant through the halls of the academy, and rested brightly on two women who stood before Vaini's "Veronica." They were beautiful women, and so like the painted ones that they might have been the living models: one so tall, dark-haired, and deep-eyed, like the regal duchess; and the other blue-eyed, and child-like as the fair, dead face. They had been looking at the picture some time in silence, chained by the subtle power of the work, and by—who shall say?—what thoughts it suggested, till at last the fair one half sighed,—

"Poor, poor thing!"

The other turned upon her sharply.

"Pray which called forth that pity?"

"The sweet, beautiful, dead girl, of course. Who could feel anything but horror for that cruel, wicked duchess?"

The black eyes fixed themselves sternly on her as their owner answered, slowly,—

"Any woman who had loved and had had a serpent in angel guise come into her paradise and steal away her right and light. Miss Powell, I consider Veronica the least guilty of the two."

Miss Powell rolled up her blue eyes.

"Mrs. Chesley! How can you say so? Please do not look that way! You frighten me. You are just like Veronica."

But Mrs. Chesley did not move her eyes as she answered, in a half-hushed voice,—

"Do I? Well, I am not sure but that I might act as well as look like her."

"What in the world are you two trying to do?" asked a masculine voice at this minute, and both ladies turned to see a gentleman standing before them: a man about thirty-five, tall, and graceful in form, and of a particularly elegant air. His face was handsome, intelligent, and refined, but under all its beauty lay a shade of selfishness and cruelty, that boded ill to the heart that trusted its happiness in his keeping.

"What were you about?" he continued; "practicing for tableaux or theatricals? If you will permit me, I should advise a less conspicuous place, for an uninitiated observer might mistake you for escaped lunatics."

Miss Powell laughed heartily.

"Did we really look so absurdly? Mrs. Chesley was only making an eloquent plea for Veronica. But *n'importe!* Why are you so late? I feared you had forgotten us."

Mrs. Chesley looked at her watch.

"You are mistaken, Miss Powell. Mr. Chesley is fifteen minutes before the appointed time."

Miss Powell colored.

"Is he? How stupid these pictures must be to make *the time pass so slowly!*"

"In that case," said he, "we had better get away from them at once. Are you ready to go, Constance?"

"Certainly, if Miss Powell is tired."

"Come at once then, for the horses are fretting, and I fear they will give me more toil than pleasure if they get thoroughly worried."

They descended to the street, where a pair of spirited bays were *champing their bits* and pawing the stones in a manner to give one an unpleasant idea of their "*thoroughly worried*" state if this were considered calm. The ladies were handed into the carriage. Mr. Chesley took his seat, and, taking the reins from the groom, they rolled away. The horses gave him all he could manage, but he was master of his work, and held them perfectly in hand. They drove down the avenue safely, and by the time they reached the Park the bays were so quieted that Mr. Chesley felt he could spare a little attention for the ladies. A magnificent equipage passed them. He turned to speak of it, when suddenly he felt a plunge, a *moment of lightning speed*, and then a terrible crash. After this he remembered no more till he woke on the ground, with a crowd of strange faces around him. His first feeling was of half-dazed pain, but, in spite of it, he struggled to his feet. An immense crowd had collected near by, in the middle of which he saw the wreck of the carriage. He went toward it, and saw two men bearing away the senseless form of Miss Powell. He dashed through the crowd, and, seizing her cold hand, moaned,—

"My darling! my darling! Is she dead?"

The men stopped, and at the same minute a hand was laid on his arm, and his wife's voice said, calmly, —

"Do not distress yourself so, Clarence. I am safe, and unhurt."

He turned abruptly.

"Constance!"

"Yes, dear. I have scarcely a scratch. But I fear this poor child is hurt badly. We must get her home as quickly as possible. Her life may depend upon speedy help."

"Indeed it may," said he, recovering himself; and turning to a bystander, —

"Please call a carriage at once." And to another, "Will you be so good as to go to Dr. Brown, and tell him to hurry for life to No. — — Street?"

The carriage soon came. The beautiful wax-like form was put tenderly into it, her head, with its cloud of golden hair, resting upon Mrs. Chesley's bosom; and thus she was carried to the house where she had been a welcome guest, and in which, with her angel-face and serpent's heart, she had wrought such black mischief. They laid her upon her bed. The doctor came and looked at her. He shook his head, and said, —

"She is hurt very badly, but she has youth and strength on her side. If she wakes from the swoon in consciousness she may live; but if not, I fear the worst. All depends upon perfect quiet and careful watching. I think I can depend on Mrs. Chesley for both. I will leave her in her hands till tomorrow, and then call again."

And so he went away, leaving the life of the blighter in the hands of the blighted.

Night closed in, and, dismissing her maid, Constance Chesley took her place by Florence Powell's side. There was no change in the patient. The long golden lashes still lay on the waxen cheeks, that rivalled the pillow in their whiteness, and a half smile rested on her lips. Great heavens! could it be that that angelic face was but the mask for the heart of a fiend? Again and again Mrs. Chesley asked herself that question as she watched her with hard, stony eyes, and hands clenched till the nails sunk into the flesh!

Time wore on. No sound but the ticking of the clock broke the silence around the watcher, till suddenly a light foot-fall aroused her, and her husband entered the room. He was very pale, and apparently

calm, but he could not hide from her a feverish eagerness in his eyes.

"How is she?" he asked, in a hushed voice.

For reply, his wife pointed to the bed.

He went to it, and, bending low, looked at her with a passionate devotion. A light like that of a cubless tigress came into his wife's eyes, and for a moment she leaned heavily upon the marble table; but it was only for a moment. Then the passion all died out of her face, and it grew calm and passive as the one on the bed. She laid her hand on her husband's arm, and said, softly, —

"I think you had better go now, Clarence. All depends upon her waking calmly. If she should see you, she might be startled, and I fear the result."

"Yes," he replied, "I will go; but, Constance, should any change come, call me at once! Think how dreadful it would be to have her die!"

She made no reply to his remark, but repeated, —

"You had better go, Clarence."

"Yes, I will go." And, with one long, lingering look, he left the room.

She listened till his soft footsteps died away, and then she sank back in her chair, and again began her silent watch.

On, on, rolled the noiseless wheels of night. The clock struck the ghastly hour of one. Mrs. Chesley started. Was she dreaming? or did she see a slight movement in the bed? She bent over the girl. Her eyes had not played her false. The awakening had come. A slight tinge of pink stained the alabaster cheek. The white lids trembled, and Florence Powell's eyes met hers in consciousness! It was only for a second, and then they closed again; but that second told her that her rival had a chance for life! She fell back in her chair, and, burying her face in her hands, shook as though in an ague. Presently a sound from the bed aroused her, and she arose. The blue eyes were open again, and in a faint voice Miss Powell whispered, —

"Drink."

Mrs. Chesley held the glass to her lips. She drank eagerly, and then closing her eyes, sank into sleep again. Mrs. Chesley stood over her till her breathing became deep and regular, and then with cat-like step she glided to a cabinet that stood on

the opposite side of the room, and unlocked it. *She paused then, and looked at the bed.* All was quiet, and she then took a small key from her watch-chain and unlocked one of the many drawers before her. It contained a number of small vials, filled with different colored liquids. She turned them over with quick fingers till she found a tiny one, the contents of which were perfectly colorless. She seized this, held it between her and the light a moment, and then, re-locking the cabinet, she walked with the same noiseless step to the table upon which stood the glass of drink. Here she again paused, and looked towards the bed. Ah, Vain! could that face have been your model, and your brush but done its model justice, the wreath of immortality would sit upon thy brow as firmly as on Raphael's! A second passed. She turned her eyes from the bed, and taking the stopper from the bottle, she poured half its contents into the glass, and then putting the bottle into her bosom, she sat down to watch and wait as calmly as before. She did not wait long. Florence soon opened her eyes again, and asked for a drink. In an instant the glass was at her lips. She drank deeply, and then—O Father! at the last day, upon which head will that blood be!

Clarence Chesley sat alone in his dressing-room. He knew that sleep was impossible, and he did not attempt the farce of wooing it, but sat thinking and waiting, letting the hours drag by as best they might. The clock had just struck two, when the door opened, and his wife entered. She was ghastly pale, and her eyes glittered terribly. He sprang up.

"Great heavens, Constance! what has happened? Any change?"

"Yes," she replied, "a great change. Come and see."

She led the way, and he followed her through the dim, silent hall to Florence Powell's chamber. They entered, and, as his eyes fell on the bed, he saw the terrible rigid outlines that only one thing can make. A horrid dread seized him, and he staggered back, but she grasped his arm and dragged him to the bed, and drawing aside the cover,

showed him the face that a few hours ago was radiant with life and beauty, now pinched, distorted, and ghastly in death! With a cry of horror he started back, but she held fast.

"What!" she hissed, "fly from your Florence!—the woman whom an hour ago you hung over with a passionate adoration that would have called the dead to life! Try it again now. It may awaken her. Do not mind my presence. I will behave as well now as I did then. Ha, ha!" And her laugh rang out horribly over the corpse. "Try it! try it!" she continued, coming closer. "Speak to your Florence."

Her husband caught her by the arm.

"In God's name, what does this mean? What have you done?"

She flung him off, and, drawing herself to her full height, fixed her flashing eyes on him, and answered,—

"It means that the heart of a princess can beat in a breast that has never worn the purple! I have done as Veronica did,—crushed the serpent that stung me! Clarence, did you think me so blind as not to see all that was happening? Do you think I was fool enough today to believe that heart-wrung cry was meant for me? Did you think that your impassioned look as you hung over her escaped me? No! I have seen all,—her wiles and your weakness,—and with every art and power that I possessed I have struggled with her for the victory; for, O my husband, I have loved you, Heaven only knows how well! But all was vain. She won. She robbed me of life and light when she took the heart that was mine by every law of God and man; and I have done what every woman in her heart would do,—I killed her! She murdered my heart,—I murdered her! And now but one thing more, and I am done."

She drew the bottle from her bosom, and before her husband could dash it from her she swallowed its contents.

"Too late! too late!" she cried. "God judge among us three!"

And the next second she sank dying to the floor.

VICTOIRE:

—OR,—

THE TURNS OF FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

BY AMANDA M. HALE.

[This Story was commenced in the October Number of the Magazine.]

CHAPTER V.

LA PETITE VICTOIRE.

"To Paris! To Paris!" repeated Victoire, as she passed slowly out of Monsieur Le Grignac's presence. "Monsieur is too good. His kindness is suspicious. I dare not trust monsieur."

She went quietly out of Le Grignac's mansion by a rear door, and followed a path that led down through grounds thickly set out with lime trees, that threw the shelter of their dense foliage about her, and concealed the course that she took. Once out of the garden, she tripped lightly along the edge of the little stream that winds through the valley—past the baths and the summer hotels, past the quaint vine-covered stone dwellings that clung to the hillsides, brown and hoary, and looking as if they had grown where they stood—past gardens where a thousand sweet flowers lived their beautiful lives, and died in fragrance—through green fields lying sunny and peaceful under the golden sun—and so on and on, till the town was left far behind, and the winds blew down fresh and cool from the far-off hills that shut in the valley.

At first she met little knots of people, idlers visiting the baths, who turned to look after, and marvelled at her sweet childish beauty; but by-and-by striking to the lonely road that wound white and glistening along the hillside. At last she made an abrupt turn, pushed her way through a thicket at the roadside, and then running hastily down a green slope, came into a little wild cool glen, hidden from sight by the great trees that stretched their long leafy arms over it, and never known or suspected by the travellers along the dusty highway.

And here a queer little cottage peeped out from under the vines that clasped, and wound over and about it, and half smoth-

ered it in their strong arms. From its door the hill ran steeply down to a silvery crooning brook. By the brookside an old woman knelt upon the stones; a pile of white linen just cleansed lay upon the grass beside her, and as she worked she sang an old German love song to herself.

"Mother Julie!" cried Victoire, in a voice that rang out sweet and clear in the green stillness.

"Well, 'demoiselle!"

"How is our patient to-day?"

"Better and better, and soon to be well," cried the old woman, cheerily.

Victoire flung back some gay answer, and then, after a moment's hesitation, stepped inside the cottage door. The room was dark, for it was lighted by a single window and around it was the soft gloom of the dell. But when Victoire entered it was as if a golden sunbeam had stolen silently in. The young man sitting in the great wooden chair by the bedside rose quickly to his feet, with a sensation of vivid pleasure. He thought this was the loveliest picture he had ever seen; this girl all life and rosy beautiful youth, with a bright auroral light in her fair face, standing out against the background of the gloomy cottage walls.

"And how is monsieur to-day?" said Victoire, advancing a step.

"A great deal better, thanks to your kindness, mademoiselle, and Mother Julie's."

"O, Mother Julie is a famous nurse. It is not I at all," cried Victoire, innocently.

"But what are you doing, monsieur?" she asked, glancing about at the piles of miscellaneous articles upon the table and chairs.

Ralph Willoughby reddened, but answered frankly:

"I am putting up my effects preparatory to going away. I shall be able to travel in a day or two."

"Ah, yes!" said Victoire, softly, a pen-

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sive shadow crossing her face. Had he meant to go without bidding her adieu?

"I have been too much trouble to *mademoiselle*," said Ralph, gently; "and I fear I have brought you into embarrassing relations with *monsieur*."

Victoire's sweet face grew proud.

"It is true that *monsieur* is a brute, and yet I do not fear him. Besides, he is so stupid! I had only to tell him the truth."

Ralph looked at the young girl in compassion. Her innocence, and loveliness, and her forlorn condition, touched him deeply. Yet half her desolation and misery was unknown to him. Victoire could not have put it into words. It would have cost her too much pain.

"It is a hard life you have led, poor little girl," he said, gently. "Tell me all about it?"

It was a long story. She sat in one corner of the old sofa as she talked, her hands clasped together, and her eyes dreamily following the motions of the swaying green vine leaves outside the window. As she said the last words in a sad *distrain* voice, her young face grew so unutterably sad that Ralph's heart overflowed. He put his arm around her, saying, tenderly:

"Patient little Victoire! You shall go away from Le Grignac. I will take you to my friends, and they will be good to you, poor child."

The handsome face was close to hers, the silken beard swept her cheek, the bliss of being loved thrilled her heart—it was so new to her—and Victoire nestled yet closer in his arms, and did not refuse the kiss he sought to give her.

Ralph was startled by these new sensations. He did not quite understand himself—he was hardly capable of analyzing his feelings. He was, he was sure, very much in love with Rose Beauchamp, but he had not seen her for a year, and this little creature was close by him—her beauty dazzling and bewildering him, and her helplessness appealing to his sympathy and protection. If Victoire had been an artful woman she would have known how to develop his incipient liking into something stronger and tenderer, and perhaps to efface Miss Beauchamp's image from his heart.

But she was only a girl, who, in her childish *nature* and innocence, saw only in the young American a chivalric knight, whose power would open to her I know not what

that was new and beautiful in life. She sat there very happy, listening to his plans with shining eyes.

He was going to study medicine; he should be rich, and learned, and famous, and Victoire, looking into the spirited face, thought nothing would be impossible to him.

By-and-by, in the midst of much laughing nonsense, Victoire began to help him in packing, admiring the strange things with foreign names, peeping into the writing-desk, and marvelling at its exquisite appointments.

"Just tip out that pile of rubbish, and I will make a bonfire of it," said Ralph.

Victoire gathered up a handful of waste papers, and as she did so a little miniature case slipped from between them and fell to the floor. Victoire picked it up, opened it, and uttered an exclamation of delight and surprise at the sight of the bright beautiful face whose clear eyes met hers.

Ralph looked up, startled.

"Ah, I forgot that was there!" he said, in heedless haste. Victoire's amber eyes explored his face with a look of wonder and pain. He reddened.

"Who is it?" she said, slowly.

"It is a ward of my brother's," he stammered. "Rose Beauchamp is her name. I—I haven't seen her for some time."

Ralph did not say that three years ago, meeting her at the seaside, he fell in love with her, in schoolboy fashion, and since had sworn to himself countless times that he would win her; but the thought of it all, flashing through his mind, deepened the glow in his face, and added to his embarrassment.

Victoire laid down the picture without a word. But the sunshine was gone from the day, the zest from the interview. To be sure the facts were few. Hitherto she had not reflected seriously. But her quick woman's instincts awoke to startled life. Her life had been one of singular isolation; she was incredibly ignorant of the social relations and *convenances*. But her womanly delicacy took quick alarm. Here was Ralph, who had just now held her in his arms, whose kisses yet trembled on her lips, hiding another girl's face in his desk, and coloring crimson at its discovery.

She got up presently, with a quiet gravity unlike the former childish abandon of her manner.

"I must go now," she said, soberly.

"But you will come back to-night?" said Ralph. "You are to leave old Le Grignac, you know."

"Yes. I am to leave him," she said, quietly. "Good-by."

She slipped away from his embrace out into the stillness of the green dell.

Old Julie had finished her washing, and was trudging up the hill. With a sudden impulse the girl ran towards her, and throwing her arms around her, kissed the wrinkled cheek. The old woman had been kind to her—had given her cakes and new milk when she came to see her, and comforted her under Le Grignac's tyranny. Victoire swallowed down a little sob, as she turned to catch a last glimpse of Julie disappearing under the vine-covered door.

In a moment more she was all alone in the green wood. Where would she go now? she asked herself, standing still to think. Not with Ralph, she thought, her cheek flushing hotly. Back to Le Grignac, to follow him to Paris, to be subjected to some new debasement, to live over and over again the old life that every day grew more and more intolerable?

A thousand times no! She wrung her hands and sobbed bitterly. A more forlorn, utterly desolate creature was not living on the wide earth than this girl. The sense of loneliness and helplessness grew upon her, till it silenced her sobs. It was something too terrible to weep about, and her tears stopped flowing, and her face grew still and pale.

She came out of the wood presently, and walked fast straight away from the village, seeking the open country, not with any distinct aim, but only with a wild longing to get away somewhere.

It was past mid-afternoon now, and the long shadows were beginning to fill the valleys. Under the shade of the overhanging lindens the little river ran dark and cool, singing its solemn peaceful song. She met knots of idlers returning from their afternoon strolls, who gazed at her with admiring curiosity. To be rid of these she turned into more secluded by-ways, and followed little-travelled roads, that led up and down the hills, and so at last she hoped away into the wide world—the wide, beautiful, unknown world, where thousands of men and women lived happy lives, and where perhaps there might be happiness waiting for

her. These roads ran through green farming lands, where the rank grass grew as high as Victoire's head, which was not so very high, after all, and among rich pasture lands where sleek white kine paused in nibbling the toothsome grass to greet her with a long grave look and friendly musical low; past quaint cottages where stout peasant women twirled the distaff, and children played before the door; by russet-hued mills where noisy wheels went round and round, and the water-fairies ground corn, and winnowed grain, and did other kindly service.

Victoire's spirits rose as she walked. All around her was a sweet confusion of sound; the river rippled, the birds sang, the bees hummed, the soft wind stirred a musical murmur in the branches of the lindens, the cattle lowed, and far up the mountain's side the shepherd's horn called home his flock.

A soft light was in Victoire's face, the words of a hymn parted her lips, hope began to grow strong in the fresh young heart. But now a carriage, which she did not notice earlier—for the day had gone out, and twilight came on apace—suddenly drew up at her side, and a man hobbled down the steps and seized her by the shoulder.

She turned around to gaze with horror-stricken eyes into Le Grignac's livid yellow face.

"You were going to run away from the old man, were you, you beggar?" he said, shaking her as he spoke. "You ingrate! Get in there with you, quick. Drive on, Wilhelm—drive like the deuce, or we shall be late at the station."

She was pushed in and thrust down in a corner of the carriage, so stunned, so hopeless, that she never thought of making any resistance.

"So I've got you again. I've got you!" said monsieur, between a chuckle and a growl. "I've got you," he repeated, his long teeth chattering, and the loose under lip quivering. "Didn't you think you could get away from me, didn't you, now?" he said, leaning forward and shaking his fist in her face.

This performance seemed to give him a good deal of pleasure, for he repeated it at intervals all the way to the station. Still stupefied and unresistant, Victoire was taken out at the station and transferred to a car. A day's journey by rail followed, and Victoire began to be herself again. But monsieur's vigilance was unrelaxing.

He sat on the seat opposite her, and spent most of his time reading vile-looking newspapers; but he occasionally varied this by leaning forward and surreptitiously shaking his fist in her face, and muttering in a suppressed undertone:

"Thought you were going to get away from the old man, didn't you, now?"

They reached Paris by diligence, at last, just before day. All night Victoire had been revolving plans for escape. Now surely was her time; when could she hope to elude monsieur's vigilance so easily as in the great city?

At the gate the vehicle was stopped by the officer in charge.

"*Arretez-vous, monsieur.* The papers, if you please." The carriage passed inside and stopped.

Le Grignac fumbled in his pockets, and began to swear. A paper was missing, and he searched his pockets in vain. It ended by the whole party alighting, in order that the diligence might be thoroughly searched.

With a muttered malediction monsieur leaned forward, and began poking with his hands among the straw which covered the floor of the diligence. The officer held a lantern aloft; the driver attended to his horses, and everybody else was curiously watching monsieur's movements.

Victoire saw that the time was come, and without an instant's delay, turned, and fled noiselessly and swiftly around the corner of a lofty row of buildings, still faster, gathering speed as she went, and never stopped till she was several squares off.

Once a policeman commanded her to stop, but with a bounding heart she fled on, and he, seeing it was only a young girl, did not follow. Once or twice she ran into sheltered courtyards at the approach of wheels, seeing in every vehicle the diligence containing the dreaded monsieur, seeming to hear in every shout the hateful tones of his voice.

At last, wearied and faint, she sat down to rest upon the steps of a shabby-looking building in an obscure street. She must have wandered a great way, she thought, for it was now growing light; the street lights were put out; the street sounds, which had never ceased all night, swelled in volume and in tone. Day was coming fast.

Victoire was quite worn out; she had not slept for many nights, and now, as she sat in the sheltered doorway, her head drooped,

and she went off in a drowse, from which she was presently startled by a rough but not unkind voice, which said:

"What are you doing here? If you want to sleep, there are lodgings to be had inside for a single sou, which is little enough, God knows!"

Victoire started up, rubbing her eyes.

"I didn't know it!" she stammered. "I was so sleepy."

"You are only a child!" she said. "What are you here for?"

"I came in from the country, and I hope to get work," said Victoire.

"You'd better have staid at home then. But get in if you are going. You look as if you needed sleep."

Victoire did as she was bid, and her conductor, calling a servant, bade her show her a bed.

It was a poor straw couch, but Victoire gladly threw herself down, and quickly fell into a deep sleep. The day was far on when she awoke with a frightened start to the consciousness that she was as yet undiscovered. It was midday now, and the din of the streets was at its height. She crept softly down from her room—it was up many flights, and was only reached by traversing long dark corridors—stopping on the last landing to listen to the clamor of voices below.

She went down presently, and paused a moment opposite the door of the saloon. A group of rude-looking men were there, quarrelling over their wine. She went out quickly, having paid for her lodging in advance, and sought a quiet cafe, where she counted over the contents of her purse, and tried to lay some plans for the future. The few napoleons that she turned out upon her palm, and numbered with such a wise air, would soon be spent. It was work that she wanted, and immediately. Her profession would give her an income at once, but that was not to be thought of. It was in the theatres and concert rooms that monsieur would be sure to seek for her first, longest and most perseveringly.

Victoire remembered with a thrill of gladness her proficiency in the use of the needle; thanks to Le Grignac's stinginess, she thought, she had been compelled to keep her costumes in order, and to do this she had learned to sew daintily. Now this accomplishment must stand between her and starvation.

Then began the search for work, the terrible alternations of hope and despair, the heartsickness, the unspeakable pangs of disappointment, repeated until soul and body are crushed, and life grows to be a terror and a burden; it was the old drama, presented anew every day in every large city the world over—a woman against the world!

Sometimes she would get a few days' work at starvation prices; again her occupation brought her in contact with those from whom she recoiled in loathing, and then in eager haste she would throw up the engagement, and go forth again upon her fruitless quest. And so in the struggle her health sank, her spirits died at last, and she came to hope for nothing so much as death. She was so changed now that she scarcely feared meeting monsieur. Surely he would never know this pale worn face, with the pinched sunken temples, and the great weird eyes, for the girl whose rose and lily freshness had delighted the *habitués* of the little theatre of Baden-Baden. Her clothing she had sold long ago, and dressed herself in that which was cheaper; this was tattered and soiled too, for she had no money to pay for washing. She had only a few sous left, and she pinched herself for food, and went about gaunt and wan.

And now, soon hunger and hardship began to tell fearfully upon her nerves; she would hardly have fled now, even from the terrible Le Grignac. Her mind was thronged with strange fantastic visions; incoherent dreams vexed her, asleep and awake; she would weep all day in self-pity; all day she wandered about aimlessly, now only seeking and waiting for the friendly death that was so slow in coming. In this weak pitiful state some nameless impulse led her oftenest to the vicinity of the Rue Montmartre. For hours she would pace up and down the street before the walls of the stately old pile that had once been her home. Vague reminiscences were floating about in her mind, vague, but sweet and soothing—memories of the child who lay in her crib, and said over the simple prayer in her pretty childish speech; tender glimpses of the sweet sad woman with the Madonna face that came to visit her; gentle hands stroked her hair, and soft kisses fell upon her lips. In these days she forgot her hunger and loneliness, and all her woe and want.

One day, just at sunset, she came to the Pont de Neuf. It was a gala-day, and the boulevards had been thronged with happy gayly-dressed people; scarcely a girl so poor as not to don a fresh ribbon—rarely a child that had not its handful of bonbons. Now as the daylight faded, and the lights flashed out like stars into the dusky night, the city wore a still more festive appearance; the throng of carriages increased, the press of foot people grew greater and greater. Everybody was hilarious—everybody except poor Victoire. She had no part in all the gayety; she was as remote in thought and feeling from the laughing groups who jostled her in passing, as if she were millions of leagues away.

So hour after hour she stood leaning against the massive stone balustrade, and looking down over the coping upon the waters of the Seine which rolled dark and sullen below. Now and then some one paused to look at the white woeful face that gleamed so weirdly under the flare of the gas—and then passed on, forgetting her in a single moment.

Victoire's gaze went back and forward from the turbid river to the luminous streets, and the smiling crowd—careless at first, but soon growing fixed and awful—the delicate tremulous lips closing more closely, the mouth once so sweet, growing into the pallor and sternness of death.

A little way below was the Morgue. Once or twice in passing, Victoire had caught glimpses through the open doors of something dripping wet, stretched motionless upon a table—and once—she had thought of it often since with a shudder, but now a poor wan smile stirred her face—crossing the bridge at early dawn, she had seen men in blouses looking steadily into the water, and trying to fetch up something with their long barbed poles, and watching for what was so brought up from the black slimy depths, Victoire had seen a girl laid upon the bank—the mud and ooze of the river clinging to her fair hair and white skin—a girl fashioned as slenderly, as young, and as fair as herself.

So they would find her—so she would lie, wet and cold, and stained with slime, unrecognized, forgotten, never missed by the world that had no place for her in it; the rich, busy, happy world that with its countless wealth and love, had neither love nor help for her—woe and want done with for-

ever, lonely and suffering no more. And so, a soft auroral glow lit up the white face, and as innocently as a child creeps to his father's arms, she glided around a corner where the balustrade grew low, and the river ran swift. Now, God have mercy upon poor Victoire!

CHAPTER VI. THE VICTIM.

"Do you think she is dead?"

Rose Beauchamp rose up with a whitening face, as he asked the question. Neither of the two or three men who had brought the body on shore answered. Dead or not dead, it was nothing to them. Ralph Wilmoughby elbowed his way through the compact group that closed around her.

"I am a physician," he said, quietly, and at that the people fell back. Ralph knelt down by the girl.

He did not recognize the pinched ghastly face, nor the wet clinging hair that fell around it. What was there to remind him of the pretty fairy face whom he saw at Baden-Baden?

"I don't think she is dead!" he said, presently, after a rapid examination. "You must instantly take measures for her recovery."

"*Mon Dieu!* where's the good?" growled one of the attendants. "T'would be an act of benevolence to let the poor thing die."

"I am afraid so, indeed," said Ralph. "St. John, it's a sad sight."

St. John bowed gravely, and glanced at Rose. He did not regret that she should make her first acquaintance with suffering in this shape. The case was of a kind to appeal strongly to her sympathies, and he was not surprised to see her cheeks flush and her eyes grow humid. But she had seen enough at present, and he led her to the carriage from which they had alighted, and ordered it to be driven to their hotel.

Rose was silent most of the way. The illuminations and the music, and all the splendor of the festal day, had lost their charms for her.

"St. John, it is terrible," she said, at last.

"Yes," he answered, quietly.

"To think what one so young must have suffered before she could nerve herself to such a deed. Are such things frequent?"

"Sadly frequent! That is only an atom in the vast aggregate of Parisian misery."

Rose was silent a little. Most of her troubles had been of a sentimental character. It was the first time that she had been brought face to face with actual suffering.

They reached the hotel, and had just finished a quiet lunch, when Ralph came rushing into their parlor. His face was quite white with excitement.

"What is it, Ralph?" asked St. John, in that quiet tone that is so soothing to overwrought impulses.

"I have brought that girl here," Ralph replied, impulsively. "It is little Victoire!"

St. John rose quickly.

"The little dancing-girl who helped you out of Le Grignac's clutches?"

Rose lifted her bright eyes to Ralph's face, and he reddened under the look. The affair at Baden-Baden was an episode he would gladly have forgotten. He turned away rather hastily, and gave some orders concerning Victoire that were heartily assented to by St. John.

Victoire had been tossing about on a fiery sea for she knew not how long. Its great waves had seemed forever bearing her further and further from land. Sometimes she would ride in shore, and mocking elusive hands would be stretched out to her that would presently vanish in the lurid glare that was all around her. All at once, with a start, and a wild whirl of brain and nerves, and pangs of keenest pain, she had seemed to be tossed on shore, the lurid atmosphere had faded, and she opened her eyes upon the pale light of a summer afternoon. She gazed about her vaguely for some minutes. It was a large lofty room, and no one was in it except herself. Its two long windows were partially concealed by shutters; the upper half of one was unclosed, and Victoire could see brick walls, and a strip of sky clouded by the city smoke. It was very high up, for a troop of doves who were swooping around the eaves were continually dropping into sight, and their soft cooing was the only near sound. The roar of the city was audible, but it was distant and subdued. Where could she be? Victoire wondered. The massive handsome furniture, the rich hangings, the carpet with its bright bouquets, even the coal fire which was smouldering redly in the grate, were not French. As Victoire lay quite still, trying to make it out, a slight noise arrested her attention.

"Who is there?" she said, half-rising.

For answer there was a light footfall on the carpet, the bed-curtains were drawn further aside, and a young girl appeared.

"O, you are better?" she said, brightening at once, her red cheeks glowing more redly, and her dark soft eyes smiling. She came up to the bedside, and began smoothing out the clustering curls that lay thick around the white blue-veined forehead.

Victoire put up her hand.

"Where is all my hair?" she asked, looking up with startled eyes.

"We cut it off when you were so ill of the fever."

"I have been ill, then?"

"O yes. Don't you remember?"

"No!"

Suddenly a new terror clutched Victoire's weakened nerves. She sprang up.

"Am I with monsieur? O, tell me if Monsieur Le Grignac has found me?"

Rose drew her down gently, and indeed it was not hard to do so, for the fictitious strength fled instantly, and she sank back, her face whiter than snow.

"O no, no indeed!" Rose answered.

"You need not fear him any more. You are among friends."

"Friends? I have no friends! Little Victoire has no friends," she said, in a woe-filled voice. Rose bent down and kissed her softly.

"Don't you remember Ralph Willoughby and the night at Baden-Baden, and your finding a kind old woman to nurse him?"

"No, no, I remember nothing," interrupted Victoire, with the querulousness of sickness.

But afterward, in the long hours of her slow convalescence, it all came back to her. She used to watch Rose going about full of brightness and vitality, with an admiration which her expressive face constantly betrayed. All at once, one day, it flashed upon her that this was the face she saw that afternoon at the cottage. The daguerreotype had not rendered the sunny lustre of the brown hair and the bloom and beauty of the complexion, but the round proud curve of the cheek and chin and the luminous eyes were there.

Victoire sighed silently at this discovery, but said nothing. By-and-by she was well enough to join them at their meals. She had told her whole story to Rose, and Rose had repeated it to the gentlemen, so that

when she made her first appearance among them, St. John, no less than Ralph, was prepared to receive her with the greatest kindness. St. John's keen grave eyes watched her narrowly during that first interview. When she was gone out Ralph said:

"She is greatly changed. I should never know her for the girl whose piquancy and grace had so delighted me."

"Did you do her the honor to fall in love with her?" asked Rose, in rather a satirical tone.

Ralph reddened, and with suspicious haste repelled the charge.

"I thought her very sweet and charming, as who would not?" he added.

St. John looked up from his newspaper.

"She is more than that," he said, quietly, and was then silent.

A red flush leaped to Rose Beauchamp's cheeks. It burned there an hour afterward, when St. John coming in hastily, summoned her to the parlor. She went in rather proudly. He did not mind her looks, but said, quickly:

"You are to go to Torbay at once. I have at last completed my business here, and can spare time to take you there."

"And you?" she said, her color deepening.

"I shall return to Paris, and remain until Ralph completes his course. But the air is miasmatic—the town is reeking with pestilence. I am anxious to get you away. It will do that pale girl good also."

Rose suddenly grew white.

"But you will remain to incur the risk," she said, in a low passionate tone.

St. John looked at her, then got up suddenly, and walked to the other end of the room. After standing there a minute looking from the window, he turned, and said curtly:

"Will you please be ready to start tomorrow morning?"

Rose went away with a full heart. Victoire going to her, found her sobbing as if her heart would break. The girl wondered, never having guessed that Rose had any cause for grief. But Rose was proud and reticent, and presently left her.

The next morning they left Paris. Rose was stately and pale, Victoire's eyes were bright with expectation, and St. John watched her speaking face with singular pleasure.

Only Rose was in the carriage when Ralph

came up to the window. He was looking rather haggard, and Rose said:

"We thought you were not coming to bid us good-by. Were you up late?"

"I was up all night," Ralph said, with a look in his eyes that made her own falter and droop. "I was at the Academy, and feared I should not have time to say good-by to you. But Rose—" he hesitated, "there is time for me to say that and something more—three short words that are quickly said—I love you."

Rose was silent. Presently he bent forward and said, in an eager whisper, close to her ear:

"If you will accept me, Rose, I will do my best to make you the happiest wife in the world. Do you love me, dear?"

A moment more of silence. Rose was a young girl. It was very pleasant to be wooed in such fervent tones. Glancing up shyly, she could not help thinking that was a handsome face beside her. She was almost tempted to answer him kindly; but in that instant another face came between—one older, nobler, not like this one, fresh and young, but marked by the years that had not touched him lightly as they went, by the sorrows that had not spared him—not quite the face to please a young girl you would say, yet Rose worshipped it. So she said, coldly:

"I do not love you, Ralph?"

He almost staggered back, and there was anguish in his voice, as he said:

"Not love me, Rose! My God! Is there then no hope?"

"None whatever!" she said, relentlessly.

He gazed at her a moment incredulously, his handsome young face dark with pain. Perhaps it was her own heartache that made her cruel. She said, coldly:

"I thought you were in love with the little dancing girl."

"Rose you know I am not. I loved you three years ago—I have loved you ever since. If Victoire captivated my fancy, she did not touch my heart. I love only you."

"I am sorry," was all she said. But she never forgot the look he gave her, as he turned away. Years afterward it haunted her, and came between her and all hopes of peace.

St. John came out just then. Victoire was put into the carriage, and they drove off.

* * * * *

Up and down the pavement in front of the Hotel de Ville, a tall, dark, handsome man was pacing—his brow bent and moody, a satirical smile now and then crossing his face.

As the carriage rounded a corner, and this man caught sight of it, Victoire covered her face in her hands, and uttered a cry.

"What is it?" said St. John.

"It was Captain Wallace," said Victoire, "the bad man who is the friend of Monsieur Le Grignac."

St. John leaned from the window, curious to see the man who had conspired with the Baden-Baden gamester to rob Ralph, but the captain had quickly passed from sight, having learned all which he wished to know.

The carriage was soon after exchanged for a diligence, which pursued its way steadily toward the sea, crossing vineclad plains lying under the sun as goldenly clear as that of Italy.

Another carriage conveying but one passenger followed leisurely, stopping where the first had stopped, the gentleman passenger taking the trouble to make numerous inquiries, which were readily answered by the innkeepers, because he said the preceding party were friends of his, whom he was exceedingly desirous to overtake. Yet great as was his haste he did not urge his driver to any greater speed, but lay back in the carriage at his ease, lazily puffing great clouds of smoke from his meerschaum.

And so in due time both parties arrived at Torbay; St. John established himself at one hotel, and Captain Wallace established himself near by. The next morning the captain having assured himself by casual inquiries that the American gentleman had returned to Paris, strolled up and down the piazza, congratulating himself that the coast was now clear. It would go hard but he should win the prize. While he thought of this, and looked out over the white-capped breakers, yet never noticing their beauty, he saw a lady pass down the steps of the neighboring hotel.

She wore a piquant round cap, its brim swept by a plume as gorgeously crimson as the lapwing's breast. The beautiful face was half turned from him, but he could see how pearly white was her complexion, how indescribably bright and sparkling was the whole countenance. He knew it, too, for the same face he had seen in the carriage at

St. John's side, and his eye dilated a little as he muttered to himself:

"I think she will do very well for Mrs. Wallace."

He watched the movements of the stately graceful figure, as it went out seaward, stepping from rock to rock so lightly and easily. By-and-by he saw her step into a boat that swung loosely at the pier. She sat down there, and the boat rocked with

the tide. Captain Wallace still watched her, idly puffing the smoke from his meerschauum. After a little while he started up suddenly, caught up a glass that lay on a window ledge near, and put it to his eye. The next moment he said aloud:

"By Heaven, the boat is adrift!" And so saying, he sprang down the steps, and ran with his utmost speed for the beach.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

VICTOIRE:

—OR,—

THE TURNS OF FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

BY AMANDA M. HALE.

[This Story was commenced in the October Number of the Magazine.]

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTAIN'S WOOING.

"ARE you going out?" said Victoire, the morning after their arrival.

"Why should I stay in?" said Rose, petulantly. But the next instant she repented, and kissed the white thin cheek, looking down into the sorrowful eyes. "Forgive me, dear! I'm not myself, I think. But I want to go alone."

Rose did indeed long to be alone. She had hated Paris, saying to herself every day that when she was at Torbay she would be happier. Now she was at Torbay with a mind and heart ill at ease. Her old love and jealousy remained to torment her. She could not escape it, and she walked down to the beach, thinking that never was any one so miserable as she. Her life had always been a game of cross purposes. If Ralph were only St. John!

She sat down in the boat, and its peaceful rhythmic motion, as it rocked on the swaying tide, soothed her. By-and-by tears began to fall. The rebellious anger in her heart died away, and something tenderer and softer, if as painful, took its place. Thus absorbed in reverie, she did not notice that the boat had broken loose from its moorings, until twice its length from the shore had been measured; then she started up in quick alarm, but she sat down again instantly, warned by the fearful dipping of the boat, which was the frailest of toys.

There were no oars in the boat; if there had been, she would have known how to use them. As it was, she grew pale with affright; it was not probable that she had been seen from the shore, for the out-going tide had carried her swiftly seaward. She gazed eagerly around for signs of help; except from the shore there could be none, for the broad blue waste showed no sail.

But looking back shoreward, she saw the figure of a man outlined for a moment against the golden background of sky, as he stood upon the pier; the next instant he had disappeared, and in a moment more a tiny sailboat shot out into the bay. The man stood erect, trimming the sail—she could see him plainly—and a smaller figure sat at the tiller. Rose was soon sure that she was seen, and the thought that help was coming gave her courage.

She tried to calculate how long it would take them to come up with her; sometimes they gained upon her, but they were beating against the wind, and progress was necessarily slow. Once a favorable flaw sprung up, and then the sailboat came on so fast that she could even distinguish something of the man's face as he stood erect by the mainmast, and swung his hat to reassure her. She took a crimson scarf from her neck, and waved it in return, almost crying for joy.

But presently the wind died away, and then, looking seaward, Rose could see a dense purple fog sleeping afar out on the waters, that crept slowly up and up, coming faster, faster still, as a light wind sprang up, and beat in shore, its purple changing to gray, and settling lower and lower, till opaque and impenetrable it closed around her, shutting out the land and the white pursuing sail, shutting out hope as well, for she could not now hope that the sailboat would overtake her, and if she escaped being run down by some passing vessel, how should she fail of striking upon some one of the reefs that choked the bay, or being swamped by the great rollers that grew in magnitude and power every moment?

It grew dark apace. The fog gloomed black around her, and if sometimes a sharp breath of wind cut a gap in it, to be instantly closed, it only revealed a wild

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stormy heaven, where inky clouds were tumultuously scurrying to and fro.

The situation was appalling. There was no room now for any of the sentiments that only an hour ago had stirred her heart. She looked back with pathetic longing, praying only for life—life without love if it must be, but only life.

Sometimes her agitation rose to such a height that she feared she would throw herself over the edge of the little skiff. The salt waves dashed their spray in her face; she was dripping wet, and quite chilled. Looking down upon her dress just before the last gleam of day melted into darkness, she saw how drenched it was, and remembered the girl whom she had seen drawn from the Seine near Pont du Neuf, stark, and cold, and wet. She shuddered at the ghastly picture. Should she look like that? All this rosy warmth, this beauty of cheek and lip, this brightness of the eye, the tender soft flash that melted to the touch, changed to something so horrible. Yet perhaps she would never be found; then no curious un pitying eyes would look upon the poor unsightly wreck of what had once been so lovely. Deep down in the lonely heart of the sea she knew there were quiet places, where under the translucent water she might sleep soundly. If that might be; that were better than to be tossed about, an inert shapeless mass, buffeted by the cruel winds, roughly handled by the breakers, pierced through and through by the pitiless sunbeams.

And so the night went on, and the darkness grew to be a palpable wall about her, and she could every moment feel the boat drawn down into the trough of a monster wave, never expecting it to rise again; when the salt drops beat upon her with fierce persistence, and the thunder of the sea and the sough of the waves deafened her, she grew weak, and almost wild; all thoughts of eventual safety vanished, and she could only sit crying like a child, saying over and over again the prayers she knew, unable to shape any new petition, but clinging to the old forms she had been taught when a child.

In this way hours passed; she must have lost consciousness at last, for she did not know when day broke, nor when a boat ran alongside the little dory, and she was lifted into it, pallid and insensible. When she was brought upon the shore everybody

said she was dead; but all were wrong. Her sensitive nerves might break under so tense a strain, but her splendid vitality, her robust *tim*, was not so easily destroyed. Rose came back from the dark shores of death, not with lingering backward looks, but at once—recovering rapidly, and being quite herself by the second day.

It was singular that the gentleman whose exertions had rescued her had suddenly disappeared. St. John came post-haste from Paris to thank him, but he was not to be found. His name was not known, and a business exigency had called him away unexpectedly; that was all that could be learned at the hotel.

St. John lingered several days—days that were a torment to Rose. She was thankful when one morning he came into the parlor to bid them good-by.

"You will do very well without me?" he said.

"O, very well," said Rose, indifferently. His eyes seemed to turn involuntarily towards Victoire.

"I cannot hope to be missed, then," he said, smiling, yet there was something wistful in his look and tone.

Victoire did not speak. She only lifted her eyes to his face—a moment she met his look—then a rosy flame suffused her cheeks, and the long lashes drooped again over the sweet eyes.

Rose saw it all; her passionate soul stirred to its depths. So much tenderness, so much fire in a single look. Ross would have bartered her soul for such a look from him.

From that moment she believed she saw how it would be.

St. John returned to Paris. He had been gone but two days when a card was handed Rose by her own servant. She read the name, looking perplexed. "Captain Vincent Wallace."

"It's the gentleman, ma'am, who went after you in the boat."

"O!" said Rose, with heightened color.

She went up stairs and made herself beautiful. Captain Wallace started as she entered the room. Her beauty astonished and allured him. His handsome black eyes flashed a compliment every time they looked at her.

It suited him that day to be gentlemanly and affable. In his manner there was just a dash of the poetic and chivalric. He

could assume it at will, and he had never known it to fail in its potent effect.

Rose saw that she could captivate him if she chose; the knowledge itself was a subtle flattery. What possessed her to smile so sweetly and listen so graciously? Was it not a coquettish impulse born of the pain and bitterness that filled her heart?

They talked of the sea, the sky, the weather, the boating, the line of yellow sands that gleamed against the sapphire sea.

"It is as golden as your own hair," said the captain.

"Do you like my hair?" said Rose, graciously.

He answered her by a look. She smiled, and with a pretty movement her hand withdrew the comb, and the silken curls fell in a loose golden shower to her lap. In a moment she gathered them up again, laughing archly, and declaring that if she had not known she owed him a great deal, she should not have favored him so far.

When he was gone she went up stairs. Glancing at her mirror, and noticing the pomegranate glow upon her cheeks, she smiled bitterly, saying:

"I wonder if I should not make a successful coquette? O, I am growing wicked very fast!"

After this she saw the captain every day. Once Victoire ventured to remonstrate, but was silenced by Rose's scornful declaration that she knew how to take care of herself. She did her best to allure him, and succeeded.

The denouement came earlier than Rose had anticipated. It was not the captain's policy to lose time. Then all his sensuous nature was enthralled. He fancied himself—and perhaps he was—wildly in love with her.

Rose shivered and grew pale under his passionate protestations. He attracted and yet repelled her. She rose up in a vague alarm.

"Let me go now!" she entreated. "I shall see you again to-morrow."

The pleading tones of her voice betrayed to him how far he had mastered her. More and more tenderly he besought her. His stronger nature swayed and controlled hers. If she had not loved St. John she would surely have yielded. Was he forever to come between her and happiness? she asked herself, angrily.

"Would to God I had never seen him!" she said, in her heart. Then with a wild impulse that was half a resolution came, to fly with this man to the world's end, somewhere to forget this torturing, baffled, unappreciated love that so shamed and agonized her.

But she still pleaded for him, and Wallace yielded some of his hold upon her; he did not understand her, but he had confidence in his own resources.

Rose shut herself up all day after he had left; her face was moody. She felt as though nothing could rouse her, and she was not prepared for the sensation that startled her late in the day.

It was just dark, and she was dreading the evening, when a little note was brought in. Only a few words.

"Will Miss Beauchamp see her old friend Mademoiselle Hilain to-night?"

Miss Beauchamp's face lighted.

"I will see Mademoiselle Hilain," she said, quietly.

A moment more, and mademoiselle entered. Her face was quite pale, and there was a subdued glitter in her eyes, but she was very handsome and lady-like. She came forward gracefully.

"My dear mademoiselle!"

"My dear Miss Rose!" and the two kissed each other. "I am grateful to you, dear, for such a kind reception, after my unceremonious retreat from Roselands," said Marie, laughing softly.

"I supposed you had your reasons," said Rose; but her manner implied that she wished to be informed of them.

Mademoiselle drew out the embroidered *mouchoir* which had done such good service.

"My dear, it is at least a thousand times I have regretted since then that I did not throw myself upon your pity; I so much needed your sweet sympathy. This was why I fled from your pleasant home—the only home the poor orphan has had for many years," said Marie, tearfully. "My brother had committed a crime. He appealed to me for aid; I had not courage to throw myself at your feet and confess my disgrace, and therefore I fled in the night. It was my cowardice, dear Miss Beauchamp. It is my great fault that I have no courage."

Marie paused to control the emotion that agitated her, and Rose looked on, rather coldly. Six months ago she would have implicitly trusted mademoiselle. But time

had taught her much. She was fast learning distrust, and growing cynical and sarcastic.

"It was no matter, Marie," she said, presently. "If you had trusted me, I might have been able to do something for you; but since you did not require my assistance, I suppose you did not need it."

Marie raised her hands and eyes to the ceiling.

"You do me injustice there," she said, tremulously. "It is my fate to be misapprehended, and I have now, dear Miss Rose, a further revelation to make, that I fear will alienate you still further from me." And here Marie buried her face in her handkerchief.

Rose lifted her eyes. There was not much encouragement to proceed in the proud listless face, but Marie had a work in hand that must be done.

"What is it?" said Rose, listlessly.

Marie had intended to approach the subject by graceful circumlocutions; but she saw, with her alert perceptions, that it was necessary to startle Miss Beauchamp.

"Captain Vincent Wallace is here, paying court to you," said Marie, her keen dark eyes watching the effect of her abrupt speech.

A wave of crimson color flowed over Miss Beauchamp's face.

"Mademoiselle!"

There was warning and offended pride in the voice, but Marie's tact was not at fault.

"I mention Captain Wallace, because it is necessary to my revelation," she said, with a pretty English-French accent.

"I do not see what Captain Wallace has to do with your story," said Rose, haughtily. "But go on."

There was a peculiar light in Marie's eyes as she listened to this scornful speech, but her voice was *suave* and low as she asked:

"Does Miss Rose remember a French woman who was associated with a friend of hers—one Mademoiselle Hugo?"

"Hugo! That was the name of Christine Beauchamp's French *bonne*, the woman who was an accomplice in her elopement with Earle Vincent."

Miss Beauchamp's voice faltered on the last word, as if for the first time it had suggested something to her, and she looked up with startled eyes.

"Miss Beauchamp is mistaken," said Marie, gravely. "Mrs. Gordon has prejudiced her. Mademoiselle Hugo was not an

accomplice in Christine Beauchamp's shameful treachery. She did all in her power to restrain her, but in vain. It was perhaps her duty to have betrayed her young mistress, but she loved her dearly, in spite of her faults, and could not find it in her heart to do so. And for this, which was at best only an error, she has always been execrated by the Willoughbys."

"You speak as if you had authority," said Rose.

"The best authority, Miss Rose. I am Mademoiselle Hugo."

Rose started.

"You are giving a singular account of yourself, mademoiselle. The protection of an alias could hardly be necessary, unless there were something to be concealed," said Rose, coldly.

"I did not come here to speak of so insignificant a person as myself," said Marie, humbly. "Will you permit me to go on? After Earle Vincent married Miss Christine he came to Paris. I lived with them two years; but the man's nature is unspeakably selfish and base, and the time came when I could not stay with them any longer. I went away, but through my brother, who has always maintained a connection with Captain Vincent, I was kept informed of their movements. They had a little girl, whom they called for her mother, Christine. The captain very soon tired of his wife; then there was downright quarrelling, in which I have no doubt Vincent was to blame, and he ended it by taking her to one of those private madhouses in England, where, a week since, she was still alive. When he returned to Paris he learned that the little Christine had been, during his absence, accidentally run over by a street vehicle and killed. Her mangled body was shown him. But, mademoiselle, this was not true. The child's nurse was bribed to tell this story, and the child was brought up by a person who, besides other reasons for this act, had seen in her remarkable grace and dramatic talent. This child is now sixteen years old."

Mademoiselle had told her story in an even unmoved voice. Now she stopped suddenly, and there was a short silence.

"This is a very pretty story, Mademoiselle Hilain—or perhaps I should say Hugo, but I am at a loss to guess why you should tell it to me," said Rose, with suppressed ire.

Marie's dark eyes shone like coals.

"You have not, then, guessed that Earle Vincent and Vincent Wallace are the same?" she said, softly.

The conviction had been forcing itself upon Rose from the beginning of Marie's narration, but now that it was put into curt words, she paled suddenly.

"And that Miss Beauchamp's wooer has a wife living?" she continued, blandly.

Rose said not a word—only looked at her—but there was a singular gleam in the saffron pupils of her eyes that warned her not to go too far. After a minute, she said:

"It will not escape you that Earle Vincent's child is heir to the Beauchamp estates in England; but you will hardly have guessed that this girl was named Victoire by the excellent person who adopted her. Do you know a girl named Victoire? Here, Miss Beauchamp, are papers to prove what I say; also to substantiate Victoire Vincent's claim to the Beauchamp property."

Rose Beauchamp stood up, her face deadly white, but for the small crimson spot that stained either cheek. Marie, bold as she was, almost shrank from the fire of her eyes.

"Do you want money for those papers?" opening a purse and pouring the shining coin upon a table. "If that is not enough, what more will you have? Tell me, and go," said Rose, in measured stony tones.

"I did not tell you for money—I wished to do you a kindness," said Marie, gently; "*cependant* I am poor—very poor—" It was Le Grignac's hungry eyes that eyed the gold then.

"Take it, then—all of it, if you choose!" interrupted Rose.

Marie swept the coins into her hands, and hastily concealed them about her dress.

"Now go!"

Marie was at the door, when a question stayed her.

"Does this man know that the girl—the heiress," with scornful emphasis, "is living?"

"No!"

Marie crept away, and Rose Beauchamp stood alone, face to face with a shame that appalled her.

Her lover a villain, and herself a pretender to that upon which she had no just claim! No wonder that the proud head was bent low, and that the graceful form shook with a tempest of sobs. She had allowed herself to feel under obligation to

him; because of that obligation, and from a wayward impulse of her own, she had been sweetly gracious to him. Her face glowed to remember that he had touched her hand, called her by her Christian name, and once had even dared to kiss her cheek—he, the traitor, the consort of gamblers and drunkards. How low she had fallen—this proud heiress of the Beauchamps! That thought, too, gave her a pang almost as deep. No longer an heiress, for the small American property seemed a mere bagatelle compared with what her expectations had been. She remembered her former assumption of superiority. She was being punished for her hauteur and pride. There were people who would be glad to know of her downfall. How should she ever face the sneering Mrs. Grundys of society?

Rose glanced down at the papers in her lap, and a thought flashed through her mind that hushed her sobs and made her face whiten. Why should she reveal her secret and abase herself? The proofs were in her own hands. Should she exalt this girl into an heiress—this girl who was stealing away the love that perhaps she might have won? Never! A grim determination settled upon the beautiful face. She got up quietly, crossed the room, and locked the package of papers in her *escritoire*. She had scarcely done so when a servant came to the door.

"Captain Wallace is in the parlor!"

"I will see Captain Wallace in a moment," said Rose, a singular smile curving her lips, a singular gleam in her eyes.

She did not need to bathe her eyes in rosewater—her sobs had been those tearless ones that shake the soul to its centre, but do not ease it of its burden. Her face was calm and proud. She knew she could trust herself, and she went down presently, drawing many idle eyes upon her as she crossed the hall to the parlor, where Captain Wallace waited for her alone.

As soon as she was gone a heavy curtain that swung before a bay window was pushed aside, and Victoire stepped out, pale, excited, almost crying. She glanced rather wistfully towards the *escritoire*, where the papers were locked.

"If it could help my poor mother, I should have to tell," said Victoire, clasping her hands in distress. "But it would break my heart to do so. She has been good to me; though she is very unhappy—any one

can see that. Does she not love Ralph, I wonder? How beautiful and queenly she is—while I—poor little Victoire, what kind of a figure would you make as an heiress, I wonder?" she said, half smiling, as she glanced at the petite shape reflected in the mirror. "I would never tell for myself—but poor mamma! Ah, if I knew what can be done. I will ask St. John. Perhaps, if I am very cautious, I can find out all I want to know, without betraying anything." And Victoire's sweet face took a pretty wise look that was infinitely charming.

When Rose Beauchamp entered the parlor Captain Wallace's keen eyes eagerly searched her face, hoping there to read her decision. But it was impenetrable, and the captain experienced a slight falling away of his courage. If she should not accept him, after all—if she should refer him to her guardian, or baffle him by any excuse for delay! He chafed inwardly at the thought, but outwardly he was the impassioned lover.

Rose heard him quietly. She let him go over all he had said the day before; she allowed him to multiply his protestations, to accumulate flattering phrases; but when, emboldened by her silence, he sought to draw her towards him, she tore herself away, with an exclamation of loathing, and faced him with a look that went straight down through all the shams that he wore so gracefully, and made his base heart beat with a cowardly fear, and withered up his hopes as utterly and swiftly as the sirocco devours the fragile growths of the desert.

"Captain Earle Vincent, if I could forgive the shameful treachery which has always been associated with your name in my mind, which made you always stand to me for the representative of all that was unmanly and ignoble; if I could tolerate the man whose associates for years have been the dregs of European society, whose life has been a shame and a blot upon honor and decency, and the foul scorn of the world, I could never forget the poor heart-broken wife yonder in an English madhouse. Indeed, Captain Vincent, when I recall your career, my indignation at the wrong you contemplated towards me is lost in abhorrence of your whole life and character. You can go now, sir. You have received your answer."

Vincent's face was convulsed with rage and shame. The veins in his forehead

swelled and grew purple, and his lips were livid.

"Who in the devil's name has told you all this?" he said, hissing the words through his teeth.

Rose raised her head proudly.

"Did you think I had just learned it? You are very dull—I see that I must explain. It will be, I trust, an added edge to your punishment to know that whatever favor I pretended to show you I granted with the intention of shaming you at last, in precisely this way."

He ground his teeth.

"If you knew it all this time, you are the cursedest hypocrite on earth!"

"Hypocrisy is the natural armor of a woman," said Rose, calmly. "Now, Captain Vincent, please relieve me of your presence."

He made one more effort.

"Miss Beauchamp—"

The blaze in her eyes, the involuntary ominous movement of the little white hand, the set relentless lips, checked him midway, and he shrunk away from her presence, feeling meaner and more contemptible than he had ever felt in his life—and Earle Vincent had explored the depths of degradation. But as he went he shook his head and muttered:

"By Heaven, I'll punish her for this!"

Rose stood where he left her a moment, a smile of triumph on her face.

"I have saved my pride," she muttered, "and it has cost me only one large lie; but that is no matter. One gets used to lying. Now, then, to keep the secret from that girl. I can do it, I am sure. It is getting very easy to be wicked." And she laughed a harsh bitter laugh, that strangely belied the promise of the lips whence it issued.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE.

ST. JOHN WILLOUGHBY did not return to Torbay until late in the autumn. In the meantime, he had taken a trip across the Channel. Ralph's medical course was completed, and he was desirous of inspecting the English hospitals before his return home. St. John accompanied him; always a curious student of the complex human being, he found this way of spending his time more refreshing and restful than any amount

of mere idle pleasure-seeking would have been.

So Ralph and he penetrated to places which the tourist seldom sees—beyond the cleanly-swept corridors and outer rooms, with their got-up, holiday air, into the very *penetrallia* of the hospitals—where physical agony, intensified to the last degree, lived out its wretched days, and only asked for the death that came all too slowly; to those woeful places, the lunatic asylums, where the sad sights move one to awe and tenderest pity.

They had just finished their survey, when they missed a railway train, and were forced to stop at a little town a hundred miles from London.

"Have you anything here worth seeing?" asked Ralph of a railway official.

"Why, sir, there's the castle, and there's Doctor Huxam's private asylum for the insane—"

"The very thing," interrupted Ralph. "Come on, St. John!"

They easily found the asylum—a low brown stone building, standing away from the road, under the protection of a sturdy company of English oaks. Doctor Huxam, a benign-looking gentleman of sixty, received them courteously, and accompanied them through the various apartments—pointing out remarkable cases, and filling the way with interesting details concerning the management of the institution. It had once been a very different affair, the doctor said. Ten years ago it was kept by an unscrupulous man, whose only object was to make money.

"There are strange stories afloat concerning those days," said Doctor Huxam. "Half of them are, I dare say, inventions, yet I fancy there must have been foundation for such reports as got into circulation. It is a very easy way of disposing of inconvenient, in-the-way people—this sending them to an insane retreat. In a majority of cases, they would in six months be in such a condition as to justify restraint. One or two such were left over to me by my predecessor."

They had made the tour of the establishment, and stopped upon the veranda to rest a few minutes, as the doctor said this.

"I dare say you get an occasional glimpse here of the romance which underlies most of the lives that we think prosaic," said St. John, quietly accepting the cigar which the doctor offered.

They sat down, and the doctor watched the long blue curling columns of smoke unwind in the still summer air a moment, before he answered. Then he said:

"You are quite right. A case has just terminated, or, to speak in a less harsh, professional way, a life has just ended, which had in it many of the incidents of romance—as we call it, forgetting that what to us is romance, is terribly, tragically real to somebody—as it was to this poor lady. I found her here when I came—a frail spiritual-looking creature, who had once doubtless been very pretty. But the eyes had wept away their brightness, I fancy, and worry and grief had blanched her roses. The attendant who took care of her, and who had become singularly attached to her, told me her story.

"She had been brought here two years before I came, in a nervous excited state—which Ilderton, the director, was willing to accept as insanity—by a person whom she afterwards told this attendant was her husband. In a little while, this excitement wore away, and she became quite herself. It seemed she had been drawn into a marriage with a villain, who basely ill-used her, and now brought her here with the intention of publishing her death to the world. She had friends in the United States, she said, and the attendant at her request, tried to communicate with them, but she was an illiterate person, and the attempt failed. No one ever came to the poor woman's rescue, and she staid on and on, falling at last into a mild melancholy, that was a kind of insanity. For a few years after I came, a remittance was regularly received from some one who wrote under what I believed an alias, but that stopped by-and-by. Yet I kept her here, and did my best to make her comfortable, until death relieved her of a life that must have been a heavy burden. She died yesterday, and her body lies in yonder little house. It is a strangely sweet face. Would you come and see her?" And the doctor, who seemed singularly interested in the case, rose and led the way across the green courtyard.

St. John followed leisurely. He had no morbid fancy for feasting his eyes on death. He had found pain enough in his life, without going out of the way to seek it. He lingered, stopped to play with a child in the yard, and finally thought he would not follow further. He saw the door close behind

Ralph and the doctor. Five—ten minutes passed, and then Ralph came out. He came up to him with heavy steps.

"Why, Ralph, what is the matter?"

Ralph's face flushed and paled by turns, and he choked a little as he said:

"St. John, you are a brave fellow, I know. Call up all your courage—if you go with me into yonder building. Don't go, unless you can meet something very painful."

St. John looked at him, dimly guessing the secret—his whole face grown as white as death, and as still, nothing alive about it except the burning eyes.

"I will go," he said, in a husky whisper.

Involuntarily, Ralph reached out his hand, and they went together into that holy presence. There she lay in her coffin, white, and still, and cold. The summer sun, shining in through the tremulous vine-leaves about the window, flickered across her face, and touched, with golden shimmer, the soft, scarcely faded brown hair. The warm summer wind, thrilling with life, saturated with fragrance, steals over the threshold, stirs the hair on the temples, and softly lifts the drapery about the poor heart that ached so long, which is at peace forever.

The years have touched her lightly; there are no outward scars, to tell of the conflict that went on so long within. So fair, so young, so pure she looks, that the seventeen years that are gone, slip away from St. John's memory, and he lives again in that old dead time; again he kisses her as he says good-night, and tells her in a whisper that to-morrow she will be a happy bride.

All these years, while his heart and home had been empty and lonesome for the sake of that love and those memories, she had been imprisoned here. How much she had suffered, God knew. If he had come a week ago, he might have told her how truly he forgave her, and how fondly he had cherished her all these years. If he had come only last night, he might have held her in his arms, and eased the passage over the dark river. Now there is nothing left for him to do. She will never know whose tears are raining on her face, whose kisses fall tenderly upon her, whose heart yearns over her almost to breaking. And so Ralph takes his arm and leads him away, blinded and benumbed, and scarcely conscious of anything more than a longing to get away somewhere alone.

The little house is shut up again, with its

solemn secret. The blinds are fast closed, and the golden fingers of the sunshine will never caress her any more. Nothing more here for Christine Beauchamp, except the grave that was opened this morning in the green turf of yonder dell.

CHAPTER IX.

BETROTHAL.

WHEN St. John and Ralph returned to Torbay, there were quite a number of surprises. Victoire did not understand why St. John looked so strangely. She thought he had grown years older. Snowy threads were in the clustering curls around the temples, that she had never seen before, and his manner, though uniformly kind, was *distrained* and grave.

If St. John was a puzzle to Victoire, Rose was not less an enigma to Ralph. He had come back with much hope. He was too sanguine in his temperament, and too much in love with her, to believe that his rejection was final. He was, therefore, unutterably dismayed, when she treated him not only with indifference, but with coldness, and repelled his advances with positive anger. She seemed to take a pleasure in saying cruel *spiteful things*.

"What ails you, Rose?" he said, at last. "You are not yourself."

Her white lids lifted slowly.

"Am I not?"

"You know you are not," he said, hastily. "You are not naturally petulant and irritable."

"I don't know. I would be willing to believe almost anything of myself," she said. Such a look of hard scornful defiance in the beautiful face, such bitterness in the tone, that Ralph was startled.

"Rose, you have some trouble that is not known to me."

She faced him suddenly.

"Don't seek to know it, then! The less you know of me, the better it will be for you."

"That shows how little you realize my love, Rose," he said, sorrowfully. "If you will tell me your trouble, you shall see how gladly I will help you."

Suddenly she lifted her luminous eyes to his face; their splendor overrun her whole countenance, and made it glow with beauty.

"Ralph Willoughby, how much do you love me?"

The answer came swift and hot.

"So well that I would cross the deepest gulf to reach you; so well that if you were poor, and ignorant, and low-born—a child of the streets—a beggar—all the same I would take you to my heart, and hold you there forever."

Her face changed, her eyes grew tender.

"But if I were wicked?"

He smiled incredulously.

"If I loved another?" she said, with hushed voice.

There was a dead silence in the room. Then he asked, "Do you love another?"

Again, for an instant, her eyes met his, a blush leaped to her cheeks, and rose till it touched the bands of royal black hair that lay in proud plainness over her forehead. He was answered.

"He loves you, of course."

Rose gave a low laugh. "Poor Ralph! His brain is calmer than yours, his heart is colder. No, he does not love me." And as she spoke, she put out her hand with an inviting gesture.

Ralph caught and held it fast.

"But he will love you?" he said, questioningly.

"No, he will never love me." And her face went down till the soft warm breath swept the hand that held hers. In a moment she was drawn closer and nearer, and Ralph's masterful eyes held and controlled her.

"Then you shall be mine. No one-sided love shall keep you from me. If I do not make you love me, I will take the consequences. But I shall. I shall love you so fondly, I shall pet you and care for you so tenderly, I shall make myself so necessary to you, that you will not be able to help it. O, I shall conquer you at last, my love—my queen rose!"

Rose was sobbing now, as if her heart would break; but all the time he was soothing her, he persistently repeated the question, "Will you marry me?"

Her head was in a whirl, her impulses riotous, her conscience asleep. Why not? She had as much right to love as anybody. St. John would never love her. Why not accept the next best to that which she could never hope for? Thousands did that every day. Why should she be more scrupulous than they?

And so at last she promised, and went away from him more gentle and good than

she had been for a long time. But an angry cloud crossed her face as, passing the little room which they used as a library, she saw a light stream out under the door.

St. John and Victoire were there alone. He liked to have that child with him, Rose said, to herself. It would not be strange if he should marry her yet. Suppose he were to know that she was Christine's child! It was easy to guess what would happen then. But she should never have that advantage, if Rose Beauchamp could keep a secret. She went to her *escritoire*, unlocked, and took out a package, turned it over and over slowly, half-resolved to burn them. But at last she replaced them in the *escritoire*, and locked it fast, while her face wore a defiant smile.

St. John rang the bell, and Mrs. Gordon answered it in person. Would he have lights brought?

"No. I don't want any lights yet. Is Victoire in her room? If she is, you may ask her to come here, if you please."

A moment after, Victoire entered the room. He looked up, smiling gravely.

"I sent for you to amuse me. Will you do so?" he said.

"I will try, sir; but I am afraid I do not very well know how," she said, as she sat down on an ottoman by the window, and looked up, rather wistfully.

"Do anything," he answered. "Read to me, sing to me, talk to me—anything to divert me—" He stopped abruptly.

"Is monsieur ill or sad?" asked Victoire, softly.

"I am both," he said, briefly. "A week ago I had a very sorrowful experience. I have gone over it again and again; my mind has dwelt upon it till I am worn out with the perpetually recurring pain. I want you to help me shake it off."

"I will, with all my heart," said Victoire, earnestly; then adding, with a simplicity which charmed him, "I think perhaps I had better sing to you."

There was no instrument in the room, scarcely any need of one, for her voice was singularly natural and fresh—hardly requiring an accompaniment any more than a bird's song. When at last lights were brought, Victoire laughingly protested that she should not sing another note; she was sure she had tired him.

"You have not tired me, yet you shall

not sing any more. You shall talk. You shall tell me about yourself."

Victoire's eyes drooped. She would so gladly have forgotten the past, and yet often when she was alone, the old things came back to her; reminiscences of years long gone by, some vague as a dream, and others fresh and vivid as if they were only the events of yesterday. At those times it would have been a relief to talk. And now St. John's sympathetic presence and kindly tone were gently *inviting her confidence*.

"I don't know if what I say will seem plain to you," she said, hesitatingly. "Some of my remembrances are very indefinite—almost as if they were dreams. Sometimes I think they are so—and yet some are so vivid that the thought of them seems to carry me back in person to those old times. There are scenes and facts that dwell in my mind, like remembered pictures. One is more real and constant, and to me more beautiful than the rest. It is of a sweet face, pale and sad like a Madonna—always looking at me with tender pitying eyes. I don't know why I associate this face with low sweet hymns sung at twilight by a child's bedside, softly-spoken prayers, that the child in lisping, unintelligible words tries to repeat; with passionate kisses, and the clasping of arms about the child, and sometimes a rain of hot tears upon her face, and then a storm of indignation swelling the little breast at some one having been cruel to her pretty mamma—and sometimes for an instant it flashes upon me, as if a curtain were pulled away, that I am that child; but just as everything is growing plain, the cloudy curtain slips back, and it is all dark and vague again, and I am poor lonely Victoire!"

St. John touched the soft curls almost reverently.

"Poor little girl!" he said, pityingly.

"But, monsieur," she said, quickly, *lifting up her head*, "I pray God that was not my mother—she must have suffered so much."

There was a little silence, and then St. John said, "Show me some more of these pictures."

"There is nothing else that is beautiful," said Victoire, sadly. "There are other scenes that dance before me like the pictures of a kaleidoscope; there seems to be a great many people going up and down stairs; I peep from a half-open door and watch them;

they are all gentlemen, and most of them wear mustaches and look fierce; there is one dark and handsome, and looking to my childish eyes as tall and grand as a king; I want to rush out and speak to him, but somebody whom they call Adele pulls me back roughly, and says that monsieur will be very angry if I dare to show my face. Then all these tableaux fade away, and there is only a little ugly old man whom I am terribly afraid of, and Adele; the house is still, and the days are warm and sunny; I have a dream of going out of doors, where I seem to be in the midst of a great crowd of people, and a terrible confusing din; but I am half wild with delight at the noise, and the beautiful sights, and the round yellow sun that hangs right over my head. I am in the midst of the crowd when there comes in sight a pair of horses, all bright and glittering. I push my way through the mass of people to get nearer to them as they come dashing along. It comes nearer and nearer—the splendid sight—and I grow so wild and excited that I rush out and try to seize the bright shining thing that hangs downward from the horse's mouth. But then it all grows very dark, and the horses and everything vanish away, and there is only the old man and Adele. The old man comes and hangs over me, and his great ugly under lip shakes and quivers so that I am frightened, and I cover my face with the bedclothes. I am in a room that is very high up, and very far off, and I get so tired of staying there, that once, when Adele is gone, I get up and steal down stairs. I must be a very little thing, for I go down one foot at a time, and hold fast to the balusters as fast as I can, but the short chubby fingers will not go around them. When I get down I hear some voices not far off, and I creep softly to the door of the room and look in. There is only a little crack, but I can see a table with something white upon it; the dark handsome man stands there, and his face frightens me, I don't know why; the ugly old man is there, too, and so is Adele, and Adele has her apron at her eyes, and I wonder why she is crying. I often cry, I think, when Adele is unkind to me, but I did not know before that grown people ever cried. In a minute, the ugly old man turns down the covering that hides the something on the table, and I see a little child there fast asleep—so fast asleep and so white, and with such a strange dreadful

look, that I am seized with a sudden terror, and run away up stairs. Then Adele comes and is angry with me, and says if I speak a word or utter a sound, I shall go to sleep like the child I have seen—so fast asleep that I shall never wake up; for the child, she says, is dead, and is going to be put in the cold ground, and will never play in the warm sunshine any more. This frightens me so that I dare not make a noise, but I cover my head and cry softly to myself, and I dream about the child who is dead, and sometimes I think it is I who am to be put in the cold ground, and I wake trembling and sobbing. After this, I somehow lose Adele, and there is only the ugly old man and a woman who takes care of me, and gives me dancing lessons all day long. I get O so tired of the dancing! but I do not dare to stop, because the old man says if I do he will turn me into the street to starve, as did my mother, the ballet-dancer; and so it goes on and on, and I gradually find out that the ugly old man is Monsieur Le Grignac and I am Victoire."

The low mellow voice ceased suddenly, and St. John, who had been looking at her intently, started. What was it that her face suggested? Was it only the resemblance of youth and beauty, or was there really a likeness to that dear dead face that death had sanctified?

"You shall never want for anything while I live," he said, with earnestness.

Victoire flushed up, and the tears sprang to her eyes.

"But, monsieur," she said, presently, smiling through the mist, "I cannot be dependent. Did you not say you would give me writing to do? And then perhaps I may come into a fortune," she added, laughingly. But he did not notice the remark, and Victoire's series of cautious questions all slipped her memory. She was not a bit of a diplomat, and before she could collect

herself, the opportunity had passed by.

By-and-by St. John said, "I must send you to bed now, little girl, if you are to have bright eyes in the morning. Victoire, you have done me good, and I thank you. Shall I tell you something, child? A good many years ago—rather more than your life numbers—I knew a girl as innocent as you—as lovely, too, I think, for she was fairer than any flower. A week ago I saw her again; but she was dead; and I had to stand by her so, and think what a terrible mistake her whole life had been—and think, too, of another life that her error had darkened. That was a hard thing—to look upon one you have loved, and have to thank God that she is dead."

St. John could not guess why she started away from him trembling so violently, nor why her eyes suddenly flooded with tears.

She went up stairs presently, and Rose, lying wakeful and restless, heard her moving about in her room. Obeying one of her impulses, she called:

"Victoire, come here! What have you and St. John been talking about?" she asked, giving her a sharp look.

"About a good many things," Victoire replied. Then she asked, suddenly, "Miss Beauchamp, what trouble has St. John had during his absence?"

"Trouble! O," replied Rose, with affected indifference, "he accidentally came across the woman whom, a great many years ago, he was just on the eve of marrying. She was dead. I think they showed him into the room where she lay dead in her coffin. Of course it was a great shock to him. But she was a perfidious woman, and treated him shamefully. He must hate her memory."

Rose did not understand why Victoire went away with such a white face—such a pathetic sorrow lying in the tender eyes.

[CONCLUDED IN NEXT NUMBER.]

VICTOIRE:

—OR,—

THE TURNS OF FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

BY AMANDA M. HALE.

[CONCLUDED.]

[This Story was commenced in the October Number of the Magazine.]

CHAPTER X.

THE CAPTAIN FULFILLS HIS PROMISE.

ROSELANDS was shining in its summer glory. Still golden days and soft warm nights followed each other round and round the mystic circle. The day went out in such golden splendor you scarce could tell when the night came; and when the long, silent, starlit, fragrant hours brightened into dawn, the night had grown so lovely that you were loth to let it go. There were flowers everywhere; wild columbines swung their crimson bells upon every sunny knoll, and around the rough base of many a great gray boulder; the grassy banks along the edge of the brook were starred with Hous-tonia as white and pure as an angel's soul; the brook itself, coming from the heart of dark deep forests, and rippling through the silence of green lovely valleys, where only it and the birds made music, knew where the shy sweet violets and quaint cypripedium were hidden, where the beautiful convallaria died in sweetness, and the orchis burned its rosy fires, and a hundred other charming secrets that the broad open fields, with all their opulence of waving grass and affluence of sunshine, were unaware of.

Victoire followed the brook into the forests, and the lonely places gave up their mysteries, and made friends with the girl. She was dazzled and bewildered—most of all by the roses from which the place had caught its pretty name, and which sheltered every hedge upon the roadside, and every copse by the way, and the long avenues that went down to the road, with pink fragrant blossoms.

It was the first summer the girl had known. There had, indeed, been long summer days, years ago, when she had looked out longingly upon the bright world, as the

prisoner looks through dungeon bars; but then, she, too, was a prisoner. Now, she was free to go and come, to dream pleasant dreams, and do pleasant things, to spend hours in the stately library, among the dusty tomes, the rare quaint missals, wrought and illuminated, and which had a peculiar charm for her, and with the perfect poems that are so few and so precious. Then whole rainy days were spent in the drawing-room; the old-fashioned grand piano allured her. Then Victoire forgot herself and all the world, and gave out her soul in the music, coming out when the darkness fell, with such a pale rapt face that even the servants noticed it; and in their humble estimation she was already canonized. For days and weeks this life sufficed her, or at least, she thought it did. But every day she grew more attenuated, the white hands became more transparent, her blue eyes more lustrous. What ailed the girl?

Rose Beauchamp, white lovely blonde as she was, with passions, affections, impulses, but with a soul that was as yet only a microscopic point, asked the question and wondered. Rose sat up stairs for the most part, and left Victoire by herself. One of those natures whose sweetness is easily acidulated, whose love is largely sensuous and self-complacent, I doubt if now she loved St. John. His step did not startle her now; her color was steady when he spoke to her. Out of the ashes of her dead passion had arisen a proud indifference that might be hate, but could never again grow into love. But there was not even this cold neutrality in her position towards Victoire.

How could she like the girl who might any day, by some fortuitous chance, come between her and her fortune? how could she tolerate the girl who had, in a week,

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found her way to a heart that for years she had besieged in vain? With her nature it would have been impossible. A keen conscience would have startled her, shown her the enormity of her feelings; but to have been keenly conscientious would have been not to be Rose Beauchamp.

So she let Victoire alone, partly because she hated her; *du reste* she was going to be married in the fall, and was obliged to go into town often, to do her shopping.

After one of these visits, she sat in her boudoir, at a delicate lunch that she had ordered. Victoire passed the open door.

"Victoire, come in!" Rose called.

Victoire came.

"Let me pour you a cup of chocolate."

And Rose's dainty fingers lifted the pretty little silver coffee-pot. Victoire watched her dreamily.

"You are admiring the work? It is an exquisite thing, is it not? 'Tis an heirloom. Those are the Beauchamp arms and initials, 'Always conquerors.' Is it not a nice thing to be an heiress?"

Victoire's eyes were instantly lifted. Wonder, scorn, sorrow, flashed in the mute reproach. But she only said:

"By fair means or foul?"

Rose laughed, but a rosy color leaped to her face.

"What difference does it make? The end sanctifies the means, in most cases," she said, carelessly.

"But, as the Americans say, 'will it pay to do wrong?'"

Rose laughed again, but it was in a harsh unmusical tone.

"And then it must be so hard!" added Victoire.

"*C'est le premiere pas qui conte*. I can imagine how any one can commit murder at last!" Her face had whitened as she said this, and she shrugged her white shoulders, saying, "Apropos of such pleasant subjects. St. John has got his famous murder case off his hands, and is coming up on Saturday, for the rest of the summer."

The glad light that suddenly shone out in Victoire's face did not escape her.

"St. John coming home!" she repeated, involuntarily.

Rose sipped her chocolate with nonchalance.

"He said he was coming, and I suppose he will stay all summer—unless he follows Miss Windsor to the springs," she said.

Again Victoire echoed her words. "Miss Windsor?"

"His fiancée, you know! O, you didn't know it? Why, it was all the talk of his circle six months ago, and now it is understood to be an engagement. She is a splendid woman—not a beauty, but brilliant and accomplished. So you may as well make up your mind to a new mistress for Rose-lands. It's a pity, for do you know I almost thought at one time that if things had been a little different—you had had more advantages, you know—you two might have done very well together. He is really a good deal interested in you. Why, are you choking yourself with the chocolate?"

Victoire got up. "Pray excuse me. I am very awkward."

She went away—the arrows of that speech rankling in her heart.

A few days later St. John came home, and in a day or two more Ralph joined them. The year had told upon Ralph. He was more bronzed and manly, more reticent and cautious; but there was still the old fire in his eyes, the old hasty impulsiveness in his speech. Victoire watched him in his devotion to Rose, and half smiled as she remembered the little cottage in the environs of Baden-Baden. Yet she wondered if Rose really loved him. Her white proud face never flushed at his approach, the lily hand never trembled, the silver tones never faltered. But keener eyes than Ralph's might have been deceived—every word and look was so gracious and sweet.

And so the rosy weeks slipped by, and autumn came. St. John had been at home all summer, and yet it had not been in the least dull. He was never tired of studying Victoire. The long hours they spent together in the library, the music lessons, the rides, the long twilight talks, were precious to him. But he never once suspected that he was in love.

"Where is your protegee?" said Ralph, one day, as they were sauntering together in the grounds.

"Victoire? I don't know."

"You should, then. Rose says she spends her time either out of doors or at her music. The being out of doors is well enough, but the less she has to do with music the better. Rose says—"

"It seems to me that Rose does not take much pains to make her happy here," interrupted St. John, in a displeased tone.

Ralph's face flushed hotly. "You are always finding fault with Rose!"

St. John did not reply, and Ralph repented hastily. "Why couldn't you have fallen in love with her yourself?" he continued, with his usual recklessness.

St. John started. "With Rose?"

"O, confound it, no! It's fortunate for me you didn't. I mean with Victoire."

St. John did not change color or lift his eyes from the landscape he was examining.

"She is a mere child," he said.

"Rather old for a child. I believe she is seventeen," said Ralph, dryly.

They had drawn together as they walked, and now paused a moment, St. John looking over the country with thoughtful eyes, and Ralph studying his face.

"I say, old fellow!"—Ralph laid his hand on his brother's shoulder, and looked at him with tender eyes—"I say, I wish you'd think of it. It will be lonesome for you when Rose and I are gone. Think of it! Wouldn't it be pleasant to have such a charming little woman opposite you at the table, to pour your coffee and ask you for the news—to kiss you when you go out, and cry her pretty eyes out because you don't come home to dinner?"

"It's a pity Rose is not here to see your picture of domestic bliss," said St. John, smiling.

Ralph grew grave. "Really, though, St. John, it would be a good thing for you to do. You don't need money, and it would be a thousand times finer to call home to your nest this little lonesome fledgling, than to woo a bird of paradise who will only worship her own splendor. Still, if you prefer Miss Windsor—"

There was a soft rustle in the copse near by, a flutter of a white garment. They turned, but all was still.

"Only a squirrel anxious to get home before dark," said St. John.

"If you prefer Miss Windsor—" Ralph went on.

"Pray don't talk such nonsense!" St. John interrupted, gravely. "I shall introduce Victoire to New York society next winter. After that, I dare say I shall not keep her long. She would never fancy an old fellow like me."

"Pshaw! Who is talking nonsense now? She looks up to you with unmingled reverence. She believes in you as implicitly as if you were the Great Mogul. She calls

you master, in her pretty French-English way. You are as blind as a mole, if you do not see that you can have it just as you like."

St. John turned his back upon Ralph and walked away. He was afraid he might betray the emotion that he felt. Over and over again his thoughts went back to a picture that Ralph's badinage had suggested. Victoire queen of his heart and his home! Such sweet compensation for all the wrongs of the past! Might it be so? He went away quickly, trying to shake off the feeling that mastered him. In a moment he was deep in orders about a new summer-house that was building—acute, grave and business-like—not at all the man to be suspected of any concealed tenderness.

Ralph went back to the house. He had promised Rose a drive that night, and in a few minutes he had handed her into the carriage and taken a seat beside her. They drove out upon the main road, making a circuit of the estate. On their way down a hill they passed a tall shabby man, dressed in faded torn clothing, and hobbling forward by the help of a cane. A moment after Rose exclaimed:

"O Ralph, there are some cardinals! Pray get me some!"

He sprang from the carriage, giving her the reins, and ran down the bank towards the brook. A minute passed. Rose sat quietly looking straight before her.

"Would madam please to give a poor man a penny?"

Rose looked up with a start. The tall shabby man was close beside her, his hat extended, his head bent. Rose took out her purse, selected a coin, and turned to drop it into the hat. But the next instant a cry broke from her lips.

"My God! is it you?"

A sardonic smile curved the lips, and the haggard handsome face grew dark and fierce, as he answered:

"It is I, Miss Beauchamp!"

There was no time for anything more. Ralph darted up the bank, his hands full of the fiery scarlet blossoms.

"Why, my love," as the horses sprang forward, "what is the matter?"

She was white to the lips, but she tried to smile, saying, "That man startled me, asking for charity. I did not know he was near till he spoke close at my side."

Her voice trembled.

"I should not have left you," Ralph said, in self-reproach. "Do you know the man?"

"No; I never saw him before."

Ralph put his arm around her and kissed the rosy lips, never guessing how false they were. Then they drove slowly homeward, beguiling the way with lovers' talk. But Rose did not forget her terror. Her face was still blanched, when, as she bade him good-night, she said:

"Don't go out again, Ralph, to-night, will you?"

"Why, dear?"

She flushed a little. "I don't know exactly, but I wish you would not."

Ralph patted the round white cheek, saying, "Are you growing nervous, darling? That was an ill-looking fellow whom we met. I did not have a fair sight of his face, but I almost thought he was masked. Some moonstruck Hamlet, perhaps. At any rate, there's no fear of him."

Rose still stood by him, a perplexed doubting look upon her face.

"Ralph!" she began, putting her hand upon his arm.

"Well, dear?"

She hesitated. At last she said, laughing, but not naturally, "No matter. I will not tell you now, I think. Did you say you were going out?"

"No, I don't intend to do so. You may sleep without fear of burglars—St. John, William and I would be more than a match for any three, I think. Everything is ready for to-morrow, is it not?"

"I believe so."

"And we are to drive to church precisely at eight. So now, dear, you must go, if you are to look beautiful to-morrow—as all bride-do, and as you must, above all others. Now good-night!"

He wondered what made her lips so cold—why that repressed shudder ran over her. He had said, in the hot haste of his passion, that no other love of hers should stand between them. Was he ready to abide by that declaration? Not he, of all men, with his impulsive, headlong, exacting temperament.

Of course it was the thought of that love that made her seem so strangely to-night. And yet her eyes had been wistful and tender, as she besought him not to go out. Ralph glowed at the recollection. Well, to-morrow she would be his wife. He could

defy the world to come between them then. He wished it was over—he wished he was sure of her.

He walked about the halls for a time, oppressed by a strange restlessness; then he went into the library, where St. John was sitting. The fire burned low, and the light in the room was soft and mellow.

St. John was sitting there, in the great armchair; and Ralph, standing near him by the fire and looking down into the kindly handsome face—handsome still, but with the shadows of age fast creeping over it—realized for the first time how far this marriage would separate him from this brother whom he had so idolized.

St. John looked up suddenly, and met his wistful eyes. He got up, put his hand on Ralph's shoulder—he was the taller—and said, cheerfully:

"Well, Ralph, dear boy, are you a happy man to-night?"

Ralph's eyes dropped to the fire and rested there.

"I ought to be happy," he said, slowly. "I have gained what I have been hoping for all my life."

Yet it was not a happy face, not by any means the face of a bridegroom, that was turned towards the dying coals.

Late on in the night the remembrance of it haunted St. John and awoke him from his dreams—dreams in which Ralph's face was before him ghastly white, and wearing that strange pained expression which had filled him with vague apprehension the night before. He woke with a start—broad awake in an instant.

"St. John!" It was Ralph's voice, loud, quick and clear.

"Yes, Ralph!" He was up in an instant and had flung the door open. Ralph's room was across the corridor opposite his own.

"Are you there, Ralph?"

There was no answer, and St. John with a feeling of vague alarm went back into his own bedroom and lighted a lamp, dressed hastily, and lamp in hand, crossed to Ralph's room.

A whiff of air rushing out as he entered extinguished his light, but there was yet a pale glow from the setting moon, and by it he could see that the room was empty. The long window upon the veranda was wide open; the bed had not been slept in. Very much startled, he hastened to light a match to look at the time; but while he was doing

so the ponderous strokes of the hall clock struck twelve.

Solâte? He thought he had only drowsed, but he must have slept more than an hour.

He glanced from the window. Was that the figure of a man upon the lawn, or only a shadow thrown by one of those firs? No shadow, but something human, living; for while he looked it moved, slowly at first, than swiftly, and disappeared behind the tangled blackthorn hedge.

St. John took his pistols, went down stairs quickly and out into the night. There was a thin film of cloud overhead, but a fresh breeze blew out of the south, breaking it up every moment, and letting the pale stars look down. With these fickle gleams darkness alternated; the evergreen copses were black walls hedging in the lawn; the paths disappeared, the white avenue grew dim. The wind was soft and warm; it brought odors of heliotrope and rhododendron, and occasional hints of the sea not far away. The odors were rich, and lay heavy on the moist warm air. One or two nightbirds were chirping in the thickets; now and then a firefly would flash through the haze; the drone of the crickets filled all the interludes of the birds' music.

St. John went on and on, adown the long avenue till he reached the stone gateway at the entrance. There were no sounds but the harmonious ones of nature; nobody else seemed to be stirring; it seemed as if he, and the birds, and the crickets, and this riotous, fragrance-drunken wind had the world and the night to themselves. He stopped at the gate and listened. Once he fancied he heard the tramp of hoofs afar down the road, but it might be the steady fall of the water over the milldam by the village.

After all, his alarm might be needless. It was likely that Ralph had taken a fancy to sleep in some other room. Now he remembered a little bedroom off the library which he sometimes used, and he turned to go back, striking into a path which wound circuitously towards the house. But he had not proceeded a dozen paces in this direction before he stopped, all his forebodings realized, his worst fears eclipsed by the ghastly reality. For death barred his way. There on the dewy turf lay Ralph, his white still face upturned towards the stars, his blood flowing over and drenching the sod, and crimsoning the flowers that blossomed among the grass.

"O my God! What cruel thing is this?" And weaker than a child the strong man sank down beside the body, overcome by horror and grief, and quite incapable of any action.

An hour before Rose Beauchamp was walking up and down her room. Her face was pale and agitated, and sometimes she clasped her hands together, as if some impotent longing possessed her.

"I wish I had warned him—I wish I had," she muttered. "What could have sent that man here? O, if anything should happen to Ralph!" And the remembrance of the loving handsome face looking down so tenderly upon her, came now to haunt her like a phantom, to awaken the keenest remorse, to call up black memories that she had buried out of her sight. Now somehow her heart yearned strangely towards her lover. She had never thought she could care so much for him or for any one again.

"O Ralph! Ralph!" and she wept and wrung her hands.

The slow hours of the night went on. Sometimes she slept, but oftener lay broad awake, imagining all possible horrors, suffering keenly.

She was asleep when the gray dawn crept up the east. Something roused her. She started up. It was morning—her bridal morning. The thought flashed like lightning through her consciousness. Her bridal morning. Ah, what a terrible mockery! For there in the doorway stood Victoire, her hands uplifted, a rain of tears falling, her voice choked by sobs.

"O Rose, Rose! A dreadful thing has happened in the night!"

Rose got up, her eyes slowly dilating, her face whitening.

"I know what it is!" She shrieked out the words, but Victoire could hardly hear the faint whisper.

She had lain down in her wrapper, and now she moved towards the door, groping with her hand before her as if blinded. Victoire took her hand, and together they went down into the hall.

There he lay upon the floor, a crowd around him, white, unconscious and motionless. They fell back before her with pitying looks. She saw none of them, but walked straight towards him and knelt down by his side, all her remorse and grief uttering themselves in the one sentence, broken

by sobs that did not bring the relief of tears: "I did it—I murdered him—I murdered him!"

"Then may God forgive you, for I cannot."

It was St. John who said it. But Rose did not mind it; never heeded his look of reproach and horror, having only eyes for the pale beautiful face that till this bitter day had lighted up to meet her eyes, and shone full of love and tenderness for her.

Ralph had been singularly restless that night. Vague premonitions haunted him of some possible thing coming between him and his love. Once before a marriage had been broken off in that house when just on the eve of consummation. He shuddered in glancing over St. John's life—realizing now as he had never done before how lonely and loveless it had been. He tried to shake off this presentiment, but he laughed and poked at himself in vain. At last he got up from the window where he had been sitting, saying impatiently, it was no wonder he was going wild, sitting here gazing out into the night like any lovesick Judith.

He was just turning away, when something moving across the lawn caught his eye.

"Hillo!" exclaimed Ralph, all his mental tremors gone in an instant. "What's that fellow prowling around here for? I dare say it's that beggar—or possibly a burglar in disguise. I must see to it."

He raised the window gently and stepped out, hurrying quickly across the lawn in the direction in which the figure had disappeared.

"Hillo, sir! What do you want here? If you want a lodging, I can give you one; but if you've any dishonest plans in your head, you'd better be off."

He had come upon him suddenly as he turned an angle of the hedge.

The tall figure that was stretched upon the grass drew itself up slowly, turned and looked at Ralph.

"Well, what do you want?"

The man put up his hand, and with a deft movement removed the mask which he wore. The moon was low down, but its light striking across his face revealed it plainly.

Ralph started.

"Well, you know me, don't you?" said the other, shortly.

"I am sorry to say that I do, Captain Wallace."

"Ah! you are complimentary," laughed the captain. "There was a time when my company was not so distasteful to you."

"Yes, there was such a time, but considering the issue of our last meeting, I am rather surprised that you should refer to it," said Ralph, dryly.

"But now you are going to settle down into a family man, you cut your old acquaintances. It's a shabby thing to do; but I confess that Miss Rose is a good excuse."

"Rose! What do you know of her?" demanded Ralph, hotly.

"I know her very well. I was almost tempted to marry her myself. She was not ill-disposed towards me."

Ralph's eyes were blazing.

"Captain, take care what you say. I am not a forbearing man—"

"Nor I—and I'm not in a mood to bear contradiction. Ask Rose—"

"Stop!" Her name taken upon such foul lips! Ralph was shivering with indignation.

The captain laughed.

"Miss Beauchamp, then. Ask her if she remembers the summer at Torbay. Ask her who rescued her when she got herself adrift in the boat. It wasn't my fault if, as the novelists say, gratitude ripened into love—was it?"

A light was breaking upon Ralph—a lurid light that was so ghastly and hateful, that he would fain have shut his eyes to it if he could. Was it possible that this was the man whom she had loved? He had saved her life. It might be.

"I dare say you have told this hideous story at all the club-rooms in Paris!" said Ralph, huskily, after a moment's silence; and then he recalled slight innuendoes that had puzzled him at the time, but whose remembrance was now maddening.

"I dare say I have," answered the captain, carelessly. "But," he added, after a cautious glance at Ralph's face, "money will purchase my silence."

"Not my money!" said Ralph, sternly. "If it is as you say, why it lies between her and me; but if you have wronged and defamed her, you shall answer me for it!" he added, fiercely.

A white rage shone in Earle Vincent's face.

"I am ready to answer here and now." And the moonlight gleamed upon the silver-mounted revolver that he instantly drew out.

Ralph's own weapon was in his hand, and

he had quickly stepped back a step or two. But in an instant he said:

"Pshaw! I'm not a fool! Captain—" But the word died upon his lips; for the captain's bullet whistled through the air, and the next moment the moon shone down upon the white pain-distorted face, upon the crimson river of blood that deluged the dewy grass and innocent flowers, upon the murderer who knelt by the body and rifled *it of money and jewels, and upon the guilty face that peered round in the darkness to see if any one was near—upon the criminal who stole away with soft step, eager to hide himself from all the world, not sorry, or remorseful, or conscience-stricken, but only intent upon personal safety.*

CHAPTER XI.

MONSIEUR ONCE MORE.

THE old house in the Rue Montmartre has a very shut-up desolate air just now. Most of the great apartments are empty, for the lodgers are gone, and save one or two who hide themselves in the attics all day and prowl around the streets by night, disreputable people, whom monsieur would once have scorned.

But monsieur's affairs have been for a long time in a bad way. There were one or two tragedies at Baden-Baden, for which the police insisted upon considering him responsible, and monsieur had consequently been forced to retire from his pretty establishment, and resume the personal supervision of the lodging-house in the Rue Montmartre. This had formerly been a lucrative profession, but somehow his lodgers always conceived a prejudice against monsieur, and this unreasonable feeling arose to such a height that not only the lodgers, but all the people in the neighborhood, shunned monsieur as they would the plague. Indeed, everybody avoided him except a few gentlemen who, though they usually wore a uniform, always appeared in plain dress when they sought monsieur's society, and were obliging enough to be exceedingly interested in everything that related to monsieur and his sister.

Yet after a visit from one of these gentlemanly persons, Le Grignac always rubbed his hands, and chuckled and leered, and said, "Ah, Marie, they will have to be very

sharp if they outwit you and me, eh, my dear?"

To which Marie invariably responded:

"You old idiot! You would have betrayed yourself twenty times if it had not been for me. You were always a fool, Pierre."

And then Le Grignac would crouch down into a corner by the fire, and stretch out his yellow hands over the blaze, and whine out:

"You are so hard upon a man, Marie! Haven't I always stood by you? Haven't I—"

"O yes, you have, without doubt. In the affair of the marquis's diamonds—"

"Hush, Marie! hush!"

"And in the assassination of the duke," proceeded the relentless woman.

"Marie, Marie! For God's sake, hold your tongue!" cried Le Grignac, shivering all over.

She laughed scornfully. "You were always a coward, Pierre."

"Well, what if I am? Why can't you let the past alone? Why can't you, I wonder? I'm sure it isn't so very pleasant to remember. But you always blame me. You always did—just as if you were always right. Why didn't you keep the captain when you had him—"

"Why didn't you keep the girl when you had her?" interrupted Marie. "The game was all in your hands, but you were too stupid to play it. If you hadn't been such an idiot, we might have been rich—rich, Pierre—do you hear?"

"I'm sure," he began, with a horrible distortion of face.

"It's no use quarrelling, though, now," she went on, without minding him. She was cowering in a corner by the wretched fire, and her dark eyes—firm and expressive eyes—were fixed musingly on the dull blaze. "The time has gone by, Pierre, both for you and me. We shall never have any chance again. We did our best. We kept in the way we were started in. We've done a good many bad things, and precious few good ones. I think perhaps we should have done better to have let the bad alone. But then it's easy to get absolution."

"Now, Marie," snivelled Le Grignac, "don't preach."

"I'm not. I'm above such meanness. I was never so perfect a hypocrite as you, Pierre, though I could lie upon occasion as well as another. But you! why, you are

deceitful to the marrow—dissimulation is your life."

"Marie, you are so hard upon me!" he remonstrated, pathetically.

"Pshaw!" She stretched her thin white hands over the blaze. "It's a doleful prospect, Pierre. No fire and no supper."

While these two sat thus in their wretched home, mutually jealous, recriminating, starving, as they had seemed, together, another was coming toward them from over the sea. He had been hunted from place to place like a wild beast. His name was upon men's lips linked with terms of execration. He hid himself from the light of day; he, once a refined educated gentleman, with a gentleman's instinct and fastidious notions, had been herded with the vilest of people, with those whose outward filthiness was only equalled by their moral leprosy, in cellars, in noisome underground caverns too vile to be allowed that name; flying always from the officers who followed swiftly on his track, often almost overtaken, hunted down, scared, haunted till he had grown old, and thin, and haggard; till heart and hope failed him, and death would have been a friendly relief—till now, his passions dead, conscience awoke, caught him in a stern relentless grasp, and showed him to himself—turned him round and round, revealing his own soul to himself in all its hideousness, and showing him, too, by a lightning flash, the purity, the honor, the noble manhood, the goodness, which all his wicked life he had abjured, and sneered at, and mocked. And so loathing himself, and still clinging to his wretched life, he succeeds in crossing the ocean at last, and presents himself before the two who are cowering over the fire in the Rue Montmartre.

A gaunt, tall, grim apparition, ragged, dirty, dishevelled, unspeakably forlorn—he holds out his hands appealingly, and looks from one to the other.

"*Mon Dieu!* whom have we here?" cried Le Grignac, in a shaky voice.

"Don't you see? It is I. I am hungry, and cold, and tired—and hunted for my life."

"Ugh! Eh!" The spectre came nearer the fire, but Le Grignac never stirred, only whined:

"We are poor, Monsieur le Capitaine. We haven't two sous in the world, and we have trouble enough of our own."

"Hold your tongue, Pierre!"

Marie got up from her seat as she spoke and came up to him.

"Sit down, Earle!"

Without a word he obeyed, and she went to a closet, where she rummaged for a moment, and came out with an old bit of a broken cup, filled with something bright and odorous, that suggested sunshine, and blue skies, and purple grapes.

"Drink it, Earle!" And he drank.

"Now, Marie, I call that extravagant!"

"Stop your noise, Pierre. Here." And she took a small gold cross from her neck. Everything else had gone long ago, but mademoiselle was a devout Catholic, and clung to this as in some way connecting her with the goodness and the heaven of which else she had small hope.

"Go out and buy food and coals!" He seized the bauble eagerly and hobbled away.

While he was gone Marie was busy. She gave him water to wash his face, and combed out the long curling hair which she once thought beautiful, and which was now luxuriant and untouched with silver. Then she brushed his shabby clothes, and brought from some unknown place a shabby old dressing-gown and slippers, and kneeling to put on the latter first, guessed how travel-worn he was—how terribly he must have suffered.

And so, ministering to him, the man, as he was, faded away from before her, and she saw him again in the guise of years ago—young, handsome, gallant, winning, and her lover; and thinking of those old days, some tears fell upon his hands.

He stirred. The apathy which had possessed him dissolved.

"Why do you do that, Marie?"

"I loved you once, Earle," she said, simply.

"God bless you!"

Pierre came back with the food and the coals, and after eagerly clutching at the part she offered him, retired to some den below stairs.

After he had eaten, she said:

"Now tell me all about it, Earle!" And he told her.

She did not say much in reply, only once when he told her how intolerable life had become to him, she asked, "Why didn't you give yourself up then?"

"I couldn't, Marie," he shuddered. "I am afraid to die." She did not answer, only laid her hand softly upon his.

By-and-by she said:

"You must sleep now, Earle!"

She arranged the shabby old chintz-covered sofa, and he lay down upon it.

"Come and sit by me, Marie!"

She went, drawing a low chair near him, and letting her head fall upon his shoulder. After a while there came a low tap at the door. Marie got up, softly glancing at Earle. He was asleep. She opened the door.

"What do you want, Pierre?"

"Only to see that you are comfortable. I want you to be comfortable, my dear," he said, with a look and in a voice that instantly awakened her suspicions.

He went away, and in a few minutes she followed cautiously, and leaning over the balusters, listened. There were voices that she knew well in conference in the hall below; in a moment they retired into one of the apartments.

Then Marie, too, went back, and carefully shut and locked the door. Her face was white, her eyes glowing, and her breath came fast, but her hand did not tremble or falter in what she had determined to do.

She put the fender before the grate, and drawing an iron brazier into the middle of the floor, heaped it with coals. She broke up a little workbox—a relic of better or worse days—for kindling, and watched the dull coals as they began to burn redly.

"The law will be cheated of its victims, and you of your reward, Pierre," she said, a quiet smile parting her lips.

She turned then to the couch, and dropped upon the low chair beside it, her arms around his neck, her tears and kisses falling softly upon the haggard face. He stirred, half woke.

"To-morrow, Marie, we will go away together, and begin a new life," he murmured.

"Yes, dear. To-morrow—to-morrow." And then neither spoke again.

"This is the apartment, monsieur," said Le Grignac, his wolfish eyes rolling from one to the other of the stout policemen who accompanied him.

Monsieur the policeman knocked softly. The soft knock not being answered, he knocked more loudly. But that was also unnoticed. Then monsieur applied the strong club that he carried, and the door flew open in a trice.

"*Mon Dieu!*" went up in a cry. "Run, open the windows—open all of them!"

"What has happened?" asked Le Grignac, with chattering teeth.

They all pressed forward into the room together, and then all grew still in the presence of the great mystery.

"They must have been dead some hours," said the chief detective, looking at them not unpitifully.

A month afterward—they do these things quickly in France—a hideous old man was led to execution. He made a little speech upon the scaffold to those around him. He had been the victim of circumstances—he had always a great regard for justice and virtue—and so on till his foul life terminated—a profound dissimulator to the last.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE KING SHALL HAVE HIS OWN AGAIN."

ALL through the beautiful October, while the Indian summer quened it in the woods, kindling her crimson fires among the maples, painting the oaks in purple lake and the beeches a tawny gold, weaving a saffron haze about the distant mountain tops, and touching the lakes with shifting opaline tints, the blackness of the shadow of death rested upon Roselands. In one of the stately rooms a slight young figure lay motionless—never stirring as the days went round and round, wearing a perfect semblance of death, only the slow scarcely perceptible throbbing of the heart preventing the seeming from being real. And so the days went on and on, and doctors and nurses, more in despair than hope, fought death inch by inch, and kept him at bay.

Up in a little room by herself, her eyes dry, and with no outward sign of sorrow except the white sphinxlike look in her face, Rose prayed for him all day long—with her lips over and over till she was weary, and with her heart always. And so by-and-by some news came up that made her turn sick with joy.

It was possible that he might live—live to lift from her soul the guilt of his death, live to hear her confession, to pity and forgive her. The faint hope gained strength, and at last became certainty.

And now, as his convalescence became established, Rose trembled to think that she must meet him soon. She dreaded yet longed for the meeting—longed to have it

over—shrunk from it in inexpressible shame.

The November snow was falling, when one day she was startled by St. John's voice close at her side:

"Ralph wants to see you, Rose. He has asked for you a great many times, but I haven't thought him strong enough to meet you till to-day. Will you go now?"

She got up immediately, went swiftly down stairs, without giving herself time to think, and into his room.

He half raised himself and gave her a long look. Whatever distrust he had had, whatever doubts, melted away in the light of her presence like snow-wreaths in the sun. Her superb beauty was dimmed by grief; her beautiful eyes were soft with unshed tears; her proud imperial beauty was gone, and in its place a drooping gentleness; her whole air and manner seemed to implore forgiveness.

Seeing her so, he could only hold out his arms, while his face became alight with love, and cry:

"O my darling, come to me!"

With a few swift steps she reached his side, and sank upon her knees.

"No, no," she cried, when he would have raised her. "Wait till you know how false, and dishonest, and cruel I have been, how I have debased the womanliness that you thought so pure and perfect—and then if you can forgive me—O Ralph! I shall bless you forever!"

He listened silently while she told him everything—never uttering a word, though there were places where his face grew white, and he set his teeth hard together. And still at the close the silence remained unbroken.

"O Ralph!" she sobbed, then, "wont you speak to me? I can bear blame better than this silent reproach."

"I have no words of blame for you," he said, tenderly. "You have suffered enough. My whole heart pities and forgives you. Did you think my love was so meagre and narrow? Dear, we will forget the past, and grow good and strong together."

She rose, her eyes smiling upon him through their tears—and just then St. John came in.

"Tell him!" whispered Rose, with burning cheeks.

Ralph told him, softening as much as possible, and extenuating wherever he could,

seeing how much she thanked him by her eloquent face.

St. John listened quietly, saying at last, with a grim smile, "And yet you are going to marry her?"

"If I can."

"She hasn't a dollar of her own, Ralph, and how do you know but the true heiress will exact the arrears?"

"It is no matter," Ralph said, with glowing face.

"Well, you are determined?"

"Of course we are."

"Then I don't know as I can do better than to give you my blessing. There is a certain will, dear boy, in which you are mentioned, and you know you are always at home at Roselands."

St. John went away with a suspicious dimness about the eyes. His face was a study when he opened the library door and looked in.

A great wood fire was dying out on the hearth in crimson splendor. The red sun hanging low in the west shone across miles and miles of snowy fields, and streaming in at the deep bay window, lay bright and warm upon the soft-hued carpet, upon the landscapes upon the walls—reminiscences of the lost summer—upon the dark oaken doors and wainscoting, and upon the lofty bookcase packed from floor to ceiling.

"Victoire!" he called.

There was a slight rustling of the drapery about the bay window, and Victoire came out.

"My master!"

She liked to call him so, having acquired the trick in the long lessons that had beguiled the winter—and the word had always seemed to him as sweet as a term of endearment. He looked at her, thinking that she had grown lovely with every day.

She stood by a great armchair, her white hand resting upon its purple cushion, her pure face full of a sweet repose, her innocent eyes meeting his fearlessly. As he looked, the resemblance that haunted him grew so strong and clear, that for half its sake, and half for her own sweet self, he yearned to take her in his arms and pour out upon her the hoarded tenderness of all the past silent years. But he controlled himself, and only said:

"Victoire, I have some news for you."

The innocent eyes smiled a little as she asked:

"What is it?"

He had a mind to startle her; he wanted to see her color come and go, to hear broken surprised exclamations, to see her deport herself like any other woman; for as she stood before him so calm and sweet, she seemed inaccessible, and his heart began to ache with a vague fear.

"You are the heiress to all the Beauchamp property," he said, abruptly. "It is not Rose at all, but you."

Her steady soft eyes did not falter, only the faint rose in her cheeks grew a little deeper as she said, quietly:

"I knew that a long time ago, master."

He was greatly astonished.

"How?" he asked.

She told him.

"And yet you have staid here contentedly."

"The money you have paid me for copying was enough for me," she said, smiling.

"But what will Ralph and Rose do?"

"Never mind them. What will you do? I cannot hope to keep you hidden here any longer."

For the first time she looked disturbed.

"Shall you send me away, then? O monsieur!"

"Victoire, little Victoire, do you know how my heart has yearned over you? Child, you have kept your mother's sweetness, but you are spared her faults. You are strong, when she was weak. You are what I fancied her to be," said St. John, with emotion.

"Perhaps, then, monsieur would let me stay with him," said Victoire, an arch smile dimpling her cheeks. "I could go on writing, and you could pay the money as usual. I shall not come into my fortune just yet, and monsieur is too generous—"

"Victoire!"

The repressed vehemence of the tone startled her. His face was luminous, his eyes glowing.

"I am old and gray, I have known sorrow; my life is looking toward sunset, but I want you, love, I want you the more for all these. Child, can you love me?"

Her voice was infinitely sweet and tender as she said:

"Dear master, I need you, for I do love you."

VICTOR ST. BRIDE, OR THE FORTUNES OF WAR.

BY FRANCIS A. DURIVAGE.

CHAPTER I.

A SUIT REJECTED—MILITARY GUESTS.

ON the 14th of October, 1806—a day destined to be ever and sadly remembered in the annals of Germany—the Baroness Ida Von Arneim, a young, beautiful, wealthy and childless widow, was seated in the handsome drawing-room of her residence at Weimar. She was not alone. Seated in close proximity to the fair lady was a gentleman wearing the rich court costume of the period.

Tall, well-formed and eminently handsome, the Count Von Attenberg was still far from prepossessing. There was an ambiguity in his smile, an artificiality in his manner, however graceful, an occasional sinister expression in his eye, which had something repellant to a woman of the world so well versed in reading character as was the lovely baroness.

"I came, fair Ida," said the count, pursuing a previous train of remark, "to urge you to reconsider your decision."

"After my injunction to drop the subject forever," replied the baroness, coldly.

"I do not remember that I gave my promise to obey, madame," rejoined Von Attenberg.

"You have chosen an ill time to renew a suit utterly hopeless, sir."

"Pardon—it is at this moment, when the enemy is pressing onward, that it appears

to me fitting to again offer you my hand, my name and my protection."

"Methinks, sir," said the baroness, with a scarcely disguised expression of scorn, "that if you desired to extend your protection to one or all of your countrywomen, your place at this moment would be, not in the rear of the army, in the boudoir of a lady, but in the front, facing death in the ranks of our brave Prussians."

"Each one to his taste, my dear baroness," replied the count, with a shrug of his shoulders, though a slight flush of shame tinged his cheek. "I wasn't cut out for a soldier."

"Oh, if I were only a man!" said the baroness, clenching her little hand.

"But you are only a woman," said the count. "Consider your unprotected situation—alone here in this threatened city—your servants gone forth to meet the enemy, only a girl to bear you company—for I don't count poor old Father Franz, the priest, who hid himself away in some corner of the house at the first note of the artillery. Hark! what was that?"

"The same artillery which frightened a poor, old, paralytic man, but which seems to have sent the color from *your* cheeks, most puissant and valorous count."

"By heavens! the sound draws nearer, baroness," said the count, rising. "Can our troops have been defeated?"

"If they have been—treble shame fall on

the cowards who have remained at home during the battle!" cried the baroness.

The count gazed on the beautiful face flushed with emotion, the sparkling eyes, the graceful figure, and heaved a sigh.

"I await your answer," he said, meekly.

"You have had it twice," replied the baroness. "Under no circumstances of distress or misfortune, after no lapse of time, could I be induced to entertain your offer. I reject it, utterly, and any attempt at a renewal of the conversation of this morning must lead to a suspension of even that interchange of cold civilities which our mutual position in the same social circle demands. I have the honor of wishing you good-morning, Count Von Attenberg."

She rose as she spoke, and her words were pronounced with the air of a sovereign princess dismissing an offending vassal. Cowed, abashed and indignant, at the same time, the count bowed low, and retired without a word.

As he descended the staircase, he muttered to himself, with a deep oath: "That woman shall be mine by fair means or by foul. I will humble her proud spirit before another sun rises and sets. Let the French come to Weimar—in the midst of the confusion I shall have an opportunity to carry out my plans. They will never interfere with me—I have a secret understanding with them, thanks to my diplomacy. And now to the court of the grand duchess, to play the patriot and hero, to tell what I would have done had I been in command of troops."

He flung himself upon his horse, and dashing his spurs into the animal's sides, rode off at a gallop to report himself at court. No one who witnessed his proud bearing, as he sat on his horse like a paladin, would have suspected that the Count Von Attenberg was at heart an arrant coward.

Meanwhile Minna, the favorite maid of the baroness, had rushed into the presence of her mistress, all the color fled from her soft cheeks, and her little heart beating as as if it would leap from her bosom.

"O madame!" she cried. "Do you hear it?"

"The cannon? Oh, yes," replied the baroness, calmly.

"It comes nearer and nearer."

"It does, indeed, my poor girl."

"Yes, ma'am. And don't you remember

poor Karl that used to work in our garden?"

"Perfectly well."

"You know he would go for a soldier, and they put him into the huzzars. Well, ma'am, he just rode into the city, badly wounded, and when they took him off his horse, he said that our army was in retreat, and the French in full pursuit. Oh! we shall all be killed!"

"Do not be foolish," said the baroness. "The French do not war on women. We may be plundered of our property, if this news be true, but they will surely spare our lives."

Here a terrific shriek burst from the lips of the affrighted girl. A round shot from the enemy's guns struck the window of the opposite house, dashed the sash and glass to atoms, as it went plunging through the building.

"We had better close the shutters," said the baroness, pale but calm, and while her attendant stood rooted to the spot, incapable of action, the high-born lady, with her own hands, closed and fastened all the shutters of the front windows of the house, and made the doors secure. She then sat down, patiently to await the result. For hours the two women were compelled to listen to the roar of the heavy guns, to hear shells bursting in their immediate vicinity, to listen to the tramp and din of soldiery passing through the streets, to catch glimpses, through the back windows of the house, of lurid flames and volcanic smoke, indicating that, here and there, a furious soldiery, flushed with victory, and perhaps maddened with deep potations, had applied the torch to peaceful dwellings.

Night came, however, and the privacy of the baroness had not been intruded on. She began to think that her house had utterly escaped the notice of the enemy, and even Minna by degrees recovered her wonted spirits. However, she prudently prepared a sumptuous supper, thinking that, if any soldiers should invade her house, good treatment might secure them immunity from insult.

In the course of the evening, a thundering knocking was heard at the front door.

"Go down and open the door," said the baroness. "But stay—I will do it myself."

Before she had half-crossed the drawing-room, however, a tremendous crash was heard, followed instantly by footsteps and

voices on the staircase. She paused, and calmly awaited the result.

"Ten thousand bombshells!" cried a rude voice in French, which the baroness understood perfectly; "these aristocrats don't keep open house, Victor. Shall we make a bonfire of the shanty?"

"Wait!" said a stern voice in reply.

In a moment more the speakers were in drawing-room. One of them was a burly fellow, begrimed with smoke and gunpowder, the other a light, graceful, black-eyed youth, both dressed in the uniform of the grenadiers of the guard. They flung the door wide open, and advanced with charged bayonets.

"Halt!" said the stouter of the two. "Present arms! *Honneur aux dames! Saluez les ladies.*"

The younger soldier dropped the butt of his musket to the ground, let the barrel fall into the hollow of his left arm, gazed on the baroness sternly, and then glanced scornfully around the apartment.

"Gentlemen," said the baroness, calmly, "may I beg to know to what I am indebted for this visit?"

"Blood and wounds, madame!" cried the stouter soldier. "We've been fighting all day, and are hungry as wolves. We've been on our feet for eight-and-forty hours, and require rest. What we want is a good supper and good beds."

"Peace, comrade," said the more youthful soldier, with a wave of his hand, and relaxing, somewhat, the sternness of his expression, under the influence of the grace and loveliness of the lady. "The fortune of war, madame, has authorized us to demand hospitality. This house is assigned us as our quarters. You have but to supply our needs, and, far from annoying you, you may rely upon that forbearance which a French soldier knows how to accord to the the unfortunate and helpless. More—I pledge you my word and honor that we will protect you against any insult from any quarter whatsoever. And, the further to re-assure you, let me inform you, madame, that so soon as Marshal Augereau arrives in Weimar, an order will be promulgated punishing with death any Frenchman, soldier or private, who injures one of her citizens."

The countess bowed low, and invited her guests to accompany her to the dining-room. She and the young soldier took their seats

at the upper end of the table, Minna and Bertrand at the lower. It is useless to say that ample justice was done by both the grenadiers to the sumptuous fare set out before them.

CHAPTER II.

A NIGHT ADVENTURE.

After supper, the baroness and the young soldier adjourned to the drawing-room, and they conversed together with the ease of old acquaintances, notwithstanding the abnormal character of the circumstances which had brought them together. In the course of their talk, the young soldier said:

"Madame, you have been good enough to give me your name. I can only respond by a half-confidence. My baptismal name is Victor—I am known by that in the army—yet my family is one of the proudest in France. They discarded me, however, because I embraced liberal ideas—turned me into the streets, in a word. My sympathies and my ambition led me to the profession of arms. Under the eagles of France I have carried a musket—it may be that a marshal's baton is reserved for me. This, however, I know, that whatever befall me, whether to die a private in the ranks, or to live in command of a division, I have a heart equal to either fate."

The hour growing late, however, the baroness assigned rooms to her guests, and then retired. Bertrand had long been yawning, in spite of the bright eyes of pretty little Minna.

"Go to bed," said Victor to his comrade. "One of us must keep watch—let it be me; I can take my rest to-morrow."

"You were always a good fellow, Victor," said Bertrand, at the end of a prodigious yawn. "And it would be useless for me to play the sentinel, for I should be sure to sleep upon my post. Good-night."

Victor sat down in the drawing-room, having first loaded and primed his musket, and prepared for his night's vigil. The beauty and grace of the baroness had made a strong impression on him. For years he had led the stormy life of a soldier, without once mingling in the polished society—in the heart of which he had been born. This lovely woman brought back to him memories of peaceful life, of bright saloons, of radiant ladies, of mazy dances and sumptuous entertainments. Might he not one day,

in happier times, fame and fortune achieved, the sword sheathed, aspire to her favor?

From the midst of dreams like these, he was aroused by a shriek in the corridor. Catching up his musket, he rushed into the entry, and at the further end of it, just before the open window, he saw the baroness struggling in the grasp of a strange man.

"Help! help!" she cried, and bursting from the hands of the intruder, she rushed towards Victor, and sank fainting at his feet.

The soldier's wrath mounted like a blaze.

"Villain!" he shouted.

He had dropped his musket, and grappled with his adversary hand-to-hand. The latter, watching his opportunity, made a snatch at the handle of a poignard he wore in his bosom. Quick as thought, Victor disarmed him, and, exerting all his latent strength, caught him up in his arms, and dashed him headlong through the open window.

"Where is he?" cried the baroness, at last restored to consciousness.

"I hope I have killed him," replied Victor. "Do you know him?"

"It is the Count Von Attenberg," replied the baroness, aghast. "One of the most influential men in Weimar, and more than suspected of being a friend of France. You are entitled to all my confidence, and I will withhold nothing. This man is a rejected suitor. He attempted to carry me off this night by force, and compel me to marry him. If he is at liberty, he will move heaven and earth to effect your destruction and ruin my fame."

Victor walked to the window, and looked out. A neighboring bivouac fire brought every object into full prominence.

"He must have got off unharmed," he muttered to himself.

"Hark!" said the baroness. "I hear the tramp of soldiers. They halt before the house. I hear the street door open. Minna must have admitted them. Fly—hide yourself."

"Where?" asked Victor. "They will search the house."

"There is one room they will not search," replied the baroness.

"What one?"

"My chamber." She flung the door open. "Enter, sir. It is the only place of refuge."

A guard soon made its appearance. Ac-

companying the officer in command, was the Count Von Attenberg.

"Are you sure, count," asked the officer, "that you can identify the villain who attempted your life?"

"I could not see his face," replied the count. "But I think I should know him by his figure."

"He has hardly had time to escape," replied the officer. "And we will search every room in the house."

"Every room but one," said the baroness, advancing.

"Without exception," said the French officer.

"You will except, I know, my own private apartment," said the baroness.

"Certainly," replied the officer, bowing. The baroness felt a load lifted from her heart.

In the mean time, the struggle had aroused Bertrand from his first sleep, and from his chamber door he had become cognizant of all that followed. He heard the officer in command say to Von Attenberg:

"If he is taken, he will be dealt with summarily. Fifteen paces and a volley will square his account."

A moment afterwards Bertrand presented himself, and saluted the French officer.

"Captain," said he, "I surrender without summons."

"Do you know that man?" asked the officer of Von Attenberg.

"I know him," said Bertrand, saluting the count. "He had a falling out with me just now—out of the window."

"You know the marshal's order," said the officer, sternly.

"By heart," replied the soldier. "Take me away. The sooner it's over, the better."

"Permit me to speak one word with this man," said the baroness.

The officer in command of the squad assented, and the lady drew Bertrand out of earshot of the witnesses.

"You are innocent," she said, in a tremulous tone.

"I have confessed," replied the soldier.

"But you are innocent," pursued the lady.

"Be it so," answered Bertrand. "Victor saved my life in battle—I swore that I would repay the deed the next time his own was in peril. The hour has come, and I am ready. When the muster roll is called in heaven, I shall answer to my name."

"But Victor would never permit this."
"He must not know it till it is all over."
The baroness wrung her hands.
"I know not what to do," she cried.
"Do nothing," returned the soldier.
"Captain, I am ready."
"You shall be saved, if human power can effect it," were the last words of the baroness.

CHAPTER III.

TEN YEARS AFTER.

At the close of a fine October day in the year 1816, a man of middle age, strongly built, with dark gray hair and mustache, and wearing a long, faded, blue surtout buttoned closely to the throat, and a cap of the same color, which had seen long service, knocked at the door of a stately house in Weimar.

It was opened by a corpulent, jovial, red-faced man, attired in a plain livery.

"This is the house of the Baroness Von Arneim, I believe."

"It is."

"Is the baroness at home?"

"Not exactly—but I expect her."

"She lives here?"

"Not exactly, sir," replied the red-faced man. "But this is her home—that, is when she is at home, which is rarely."

"I am weary—having walked a long distance," said the stranger. "Have you any objection to my walking in and resting for a while?"

"None in the least, sir. The doors of this house are always open, though the mistress is rarely at home."

The stranger was ushered into the sitting-room, and the corpulent man who had admitted him busied himself in procuring refreshments, bread and cheese, and beer, of which the stranger gratefully partook.

"Pardon me, sir," said the red-faced man, "but though you speak German excellently, I thought I detected a little of the French accent."

"I came by it honestly," said the stranger. "I am a Frenchman."

"Your hand!" cried the red-faced man. "I, too, am a Frenchman. *Vive la France!*"

"*Vive la France!*" repeated the stranger. "But how comes it that you, a lover of *la bella France*, are settled down away here in Germany?"

"Ah! it is a long story, fellow-countryman," said the man. "I came here with the French army in 1806, this very day, ten years ago. This is between ourselves. I and a comrade were quartered in this house. He had a scuffle with one of the grandees of the place, and came near killing him. A guard came to arrest him. I confessed the crime to save his life, for he had once saved mine. Luckily, my affair was put off till the next morning—and for want of a better prison, I was lodged in an outhouse. But my good angel was not asleep."

"Your good angel?"

"Yes, in the shape of as plump and pretty a girl as ever your eyes rested on. My angel cajoled the sentinels, gave them drugged wine, and when they were sound asleep, set me at liberty, and found me a secure hiding-place. The grand army marched away without me. In due time I emerged into daylight again, shaved off my whiskers and moustache, bade adieu to eagles and to glory, married my preserver, and became a steward, as my wife is housekeeper, to the Baroness Ida Von Arneim—the loveliest and most unhappy lady in the world."

"What is the cause of her unhappiness?"

"That is a secret known only to herself," said the ex-soldier. "All I know about it is, that, a few months after the battle of Jena, she left Weimar suddenly, and went away, somewhere, where, I know not. She came back in a year, much changed in appearance, though still lovely, but with a sad, spiritual beauty, touching to look upon. She did not remain here long, but went away to a country-house in Berlin, whither she was summoned by her father, old General Von Rastadt, who found himself in failing health. She always comes here, however, on the anniversary of the battle of Jena—this day—and generally remains for a few days. She is kind to us—gentle as ever—but something evidently weighs upon her mind."

"Has she shown no intention of changing her condition—of marrying again?" asked the stranger.

"None. She has had suitors—more than I can reckon on my fingers—but she sends them all to the right about, in double quick time. This makes us think that her sadness is an affair of the heart. My wife, Minna, will have it that she lost her heart to my comrade, Victor, who was quartered

here with me, after the battle of Jena. But I don't believe in love at first sight—not I! Victor was a fine fellow, however. I wonder what has become of him."

"Killed, most probably," said the stranger. "Few of the old Guard survived Waterloo."

"Ah! Waterloo! they were too much for the Little Corporal there. English, French, Dutch, Germans, all the world against him. But for the baroness I should have been forced to march against the emperor. But she saved me from conscription, and, thank Heaven! Europe is at peace once more. But you must excuse me now, for I hear carriage-wheels, and it may be the baroness."

In a short time the door opened, and a lady appeared, accompanied by an old gentleman. It was the baroness, and her father, General Von Rastadt.

"I am told you wished to see me, sir," said the baroness.

"Yes, madame," replied the stranger, with some embarrassment; "that is, if I have the honor of addressing the Baroness Ida Von Arneim."

"That is my name, sir," said the lady.

Bertrand, and his wife Minna, now a pretty dame, had entered the room, and were busy with some household arrangements, but of course their curiosity permitted them to lose nothing of what passed between the mysterious stranger and their mistress.

"Ten years ago," said the stranger, "a young French soldier, who bore the name of Victor, was a guest in this house."

"I remember him," said the baroness, in a voice shaken with emotion. "I have heard nothing of him since that day. I have supposed him—" here the tears gathered in her eyes—"dead."

"He is not dead," replied the stranger.

The baroness raised her eyes to heaven, and clasped her hands, while her lips moved as if uttering a prayer.

"He lives, sir, you say?" she resumed, but deeply agitated.

"Lives and is well. Moreover, he would present himself here if he thought you hadn't forgotten him."

"I thought he had forgotten me," said the baroness, in a low tone.

"Not for one moment!" cried the stranger. "In the roar of battle—in the hour of victory—in the hour of defeat—at Moscow,

at the Berezina, at Waterloo—he thought of you as the devotee thinks of his patron saint. "Look on me," he cried, advancing into the full light of the apartment (he had hitherto kept himself in the shade)—"Ida Von Arneim, have you forgotten your poor Victor?"

He extended his arms. The baroness rushed to his embrace, and folded him to her heart.

"Are you not a little too demonstrative, my dear?" asked her father, uneasily, as he drew her away from the guest, whose faded surtout and general shabbiness impressed him most unpleasantly.

"You know the inestimable service he rendered me," said the baroness, apologetically.

"Yes—yes—I know all about that," said the general, testily.

"Ten thousand bombshells!" cried Bertrand, "what a lout I was not to recognize my old comrade! If German beer and sausages hadn't muddled my brain, I should have known him among a thousand."

And he hugged his old comrade to his heart. Minna, too, received an affectionate embrace and recognition.

"And now, sir," said the old general, stiffly, "pray tell me what I can do for you."

"I come, sir," said Victor, "to ask you for the hand of your daughter."

The blood mounted to the old general's face. He eyed the speaker from head to foot, in speechless indignation. At last he found breath to say:

"Upon my word, sir, you are a very modest man."

"I await your answer, sir," said Victor, placidly.

"Are you serious?"

"Quite serious."

"Very good, sir. Then I reply that my daughter, with my consent, bestows her hand on no one who is not my equal in rank and position."

"That is fair and proper," answered Victor, coolly.

"In the first place, then," said Von Rastadt, "I am a general."

"So am I," answered Victor, throwing open his surtout, and displaying the uniform and insignia of his rank. "But I outrank you, for I am a marshal of France."

"I wear the cross of the Black Eagle," said Von Rastadt.

"And I the cross of the Legion of Honor," answered Victor.

"I am a baron of the empire."

"And I a duke and peer of France—the proofs are at your disposal. Though I followed my emperor to the fatal field of Waterloo, the king has restored me to the honors and estates of my race. As duke and marshal of France, may I, Victor St. Bride, call myself your equal, baron?"

"Give me your hand, my dear duke," said the old man, "I shall be proud of your alliance. Ida, what say you to this gentleman's offer?"

The baroness blushed deeply, but was silent.

"Shall I betray our secret, Ida?" asked St. Bride, taking her hand.

The baroness nodded assent.

"Then know," said St. Bride, "that *this lady is already my wife!*"

"Your wife!" said the astounded general.

"Ten years ago to-night, we were married in this house by Father Franz, an aged priest, who is still alive to testify to the fact. It was a night of terror—the night that followed the battle of Jena. I saved your daughter from forcible abduction, but, by the act, incurred the deadly enmity of the Count Von Attenberg. Soldiers were sent to arrest me—only one room in the house was sacred from search. That room—sacred as a holy shrine—no man living had a right to occupy but her husband. She hid me there. There, that no blot might rest upon her fame, our hands were united by a priest. But I, a poor soldier, never dreamed of calling her my own, though the church would have sanctioned the pretension. I tore myself away from my generous benefactress, and followed the fortunes of war. I had released her from her vows, the moment they were uttered. But I did not forget her. I had before lived for glory—I now lived for love. I sought promotion in the cannon's mouth, because each step raised me nearer to her social level. Then came the fatal field of

Waterloo. I survived the carnage, but I deemed my fortunes ruined by the event. The influence of my family, however, now once more, by the restoration of the Bourbons, replaced to their former rank, sufficed to procure an amnesty for the past; and open a path to the future. I was presented to the king, and he was good enough to say, that he knew a soldier who had been as true as I had been to Napoleon would be true to his legitimate sovereign, now that the sceptre had irrevocably changed hands. Once secure in my position, I hastened to Weimar to find Ida, yet free, yet loving, yet trusting, and oh! more beautiful than ever."

Baron Von Rastadt took a huge pinch of snuff.

"Very romantic, and very irregular!" said he. "Nothing equal to it in the annals of the Von Rastadts, and they date back to the time of Noah. But what's done can't be undone, though it may as well remain a family secret. That marriage was null and void. There must be a public ceremony."

"But you forgive us, father!" said Ida.

"Of course I do," said the old gentleman.

"Cordially—entirely."

The duke and the baroness were publicly united in a few days, with all the ceremony and parade that the rank of the parties required. The grand duke and duchess were present on the occasion, and it was remembered long afterwards that Goethe kissed the bride.

In the happy years that followed, they divided their time between Paris and Weimar. Bertrand and Minna followed their fortunes, treated always rather as friends than domestics. Indeed when wholly alone, Victor and Bertrand fought their battles over again, and renewed the familiarity of their old campaigning days. But in the presence of company, the the ex-grenadier treated his old comrade with the most punctilious respect, nor was he ever known to boast among his associates of his former intimacy with a peer and a marshal of France.

VIOLETS.

Morris, Anna

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VIOLETS.

BY ANNA MORRIS.

BRILLIANTLY lighted rooms, filled with a gay throng of "brave men and fair women," moving in response to the bewitching strains of a Strauss waltz. What in all this scene recalled to the mind of Philip Clayton a moss-covered bank dotted with violets—the soft breath of a May morning just stirring the young leaves of the trees above his head, as he bent to look into the deep eyes of the young girl at his side—themselves the hue of the flowers she held in her hand?

That was five years ago, and although often recalled, perhaps never had the scene returned so vividly; so completely overwhelmed him that he seemed to be once more *living* it; and dropping into a seat near him, which chanced to be at an open window where the heavy curtains partially shut out the light and noise, he abandoned himself to his memories.

How sweet and trustful rose before him the lovely face of that fair girl—May Barclay—"his May," he had called her that day—for the first time. She was the orphan grandchild of the old farmer with whom he had taken board for a few weeks while recovering from a long illness, and many were the sweet shy attentions she had shown to the poor pale student. As he grew stronger, and able to follow her fleet steps, she had introduced him to all her favorite haunts—her seat in the old elm that overshadowed the brook—the soft bed of pine needles in the little grove behind the farmhouse—and on this well-remembered morning, the mossy bank where the first violets were always found. Grandfather Barclay made no objection when Philip told of his love for his grandchild, for Philip had won his heart, as well as May's.

"She is a good girl," he said, fondly

stroking her soft curls, "and will make you a good wife some day. You are both of you too young yet to think much of such matters. Go back to your studies with a brave heart, my boy, and be sure that wherever you may be, and whatever you may be doing, there is always one, thinking of you and loving you, waiting patiently for the time when you may come back and claim her."

And then there had been a few bright, beautiful and happy days, when all heaven and earth seemed to rejoice and be happy with the young lovers—a final walk to the mossy bank—a few violets gathered as a parting token (they were resting next his heart even now), a sorrowful farewell, and he had left his darling sobbing in her grandfather's arms, as broken-hearted as if she had had a presentiment of all that was to befall before they met again.

Philip fully intended to return in three months, when the next vacation would occur, but when scarcely a week remained, to be eagerly counted over, before their joyful meeting, he received news of the sudden death of his father, in a distant State. He was therefore obliged to postpone his visit to Willowbrook, May's home, and hurry to G., his father's late residence. Mr. Clayton had left a large property, and his wife being dead, and Philip the only child, of course our hero found himself heir to the whole. This involved him in much business, and the college term had already commenced before he could leave G. As this was his last year, he was doubly anxious to lose no time, and he and May therefore agreed, though most reluctantly, that it was best for him not to attempt to visit her until the few days that he should have about Christmas time.

Slowly the days and weeks dragged by, but they were cheered by the frequent letters which passed between the lovers. About the first of December, May wrote a sorrowful little note, telling of her grandfather's illness. He had been sick for several days, she said, but the doctor thought she was needlessly alarmed, and she would write again very soon and tell Philip how he was.

That was the last! Philip had replied, full of sympathy, and offering, if May would feel any easier about her grandfather, to go at once and assist her in taking care of him. No answer had come, and after waiting a

few days, he wrote again. Still no answer, and again and again he wrote and waited. At last, growing desperate, feeling sure that the old man was dead, and May ill with grief, he could wait no longer, and started for Willowbrook.

It was a chilly winter's day when he left the lumbering old stagecoach which had conveyed him the last ten miles of his journey, and walked rapidly across the well-known fields which separated him from the farmhouse. Every one of them recalled some memory of that happy visit, though they looked cold and dreary in their winter garb of snow and ice.

There was a desolate look about the old farmhouse, too, as he came within sight of it. No smoke curling up from its chimney, gates closed, and evidently no paths made since the last snowstorm.

"It looks completely deserted!" he exclaimed, with sudden apprehension, and then smiled at his own fears. "Perhaps it always looks so in winter," he thought, "and of course if Mr. Barclay is sick, May has no one to attend to outdoor matters."

By this time he had reached the front door and tried the latch. It would not yield to his hand. "Perhaps they use the back door in winter," he muttered, resolutely forcing back the forebodings which were stealing over him. But the back door was fastened also, and every window had its heavy wooden shutter carefully bolted on the inside.

Finding all effort to enter the house useless, Philip made the best of his way to the next house, which was, however, nearly a mile distant. Its occupants were newcomers, and knew little of the neighborhood. They had heard that old Mr. Barclay was dead, but did not know what had become of his family—did not know indeed what family he had left—perhaps some of the other neighbors might know more about them. Wearily therefore Philip retraced his steps, and passing the farmhouse, went to the nearest neighbors on the other side. Here he obtained more information, though by no means of a satisfactory nature. Mr. Barclay had been sick but a few days—must in fact have died just about the date of May's last note. Some fine lady had come with her carriage and servants the day before his death. Some said it was the old man's niece, and others his daughter. She had seemed haughty,

and refused all the offers of assistance made by the kindly neighbors, saying that her servants could make all necessary arrangements. Immediately after the funeral the house had been placed in the hands of an agent, for sale, and the stranger had departed, accompanied by May Barclay. No hint had been given of their destination; even the house agent had merely been told to communicate with a lawyer in the city.

Obtaining this lawyer's address from the agent, Philip wrote to him, begging for information regarding Miss Barclay, but received only a curt reply to the effect that no one of that name was known to the writer; and to a second letter which Philip wrote, speaking of the strange lady who had visited Willowbrook, and taken Miss Barclay with her, no answer was made.

Sadly Philip returned to his studies, though he still hoped that as soon as May had recovered a little from the shock of her grandfather's death, that she would write, and explain everything. But day after day passed, and not one word was ever received. In vain Philip spent every holiday in searching for some clue by which to find her. He fairly haunted the lawyer whose address had been given him by the house agent. Numberless were the visits he made to his office before he succeeded in having an interview granted him. When he finally gained this point, it availed him nothing, for the legal gentleman either was perfectly ignorant, or chose to appear so.

So time went on. Philip had graduated, and commenced the practice of medicine, but his heart was not in his work. Young, handsome and wealthy, he was much sought after by the best society in the city where he had settled. Young ladies smiled upon him, papas and mammas showed him the most flattering attentions, but all in vain. Dr. Clayton might have been carved out of marble, for all the effect these blandishments had upon him. He went much into company, but always with a searching preoccupied air, as if looking or listening for something far away.

Thus it happened, that, being used to his odd way, no one had disturbed his long reverie behind the window curtain. As all these sad memories swept over him, he rested his head against the casement, with a sigh that was almost a groan, and covered his face with his hand. Many gay couples flitted past him—some in the room,

some on the balcony outside, but he heeded none.

That fateful morning by the violet-covered bank seemed to engross all his thoughts. "I could almost fancy that even the faint sweet odor of the blossoms had come back," he muttered, raising his head at last. Was he dreaming? Upon the broad window seat, close by his hand, lay a bunch of wood moss and violets, the very counterpart of the one which had lain next his heart for so many years.

He gazed upon it with amazement, and raised it as eagerly as if it had been a direct messenger from his lost May. Then a bitter smile at his own folly crossed his lips.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed. "Doubtless it dropped from the dress of some one of the dancers."

The voice of his hostess, addressing him by name, caused him to start, and hastily conceal the tiny bouquet.

"Dr. Clayton," said the intruder, "pray come with me, and allow me to introduce you to my young friend Miss Dennison. She has but just arrived in the city, and I wish to make her feel acquainted and at home as soon as possible. I am sure you will admire her."

Dr. Clayton was by no means certain of this. In fact, he admired very few of the numerous young ladies with whom he was acquainted, but he merely bowed politely, and accompanied Mrs. Forrester to a distant part of the room, where, judging from the number of gentlemen assembled, some "bright particular star" was holding quite a court.

They parted right and left for their hostess and her companion, and thereby disclosed the object of their admiration—a tall queenly-looking lady, with a face of rare beauty, and eyes whose color matched that of the violets which looped her snowy dress.

"The owner of my bouquet," thought Dr. Clayton, bowing profoundly, as the formal "Dr. Clayton, Miss Dennison," sounded in his ears.

"Did Miss Dennison always blush so becomingly when introduced?" he wondered,—"and the next instant grow so startlingly white? And did her hand always tremble so when she accepted a stranger's arm?" was his next thought, as, in response to his invitation to dance, she placed her little gloved hand on his arm.

Another moment, and they were in the

whirl and rush of dancers. Philip danced, as he did most things, well and gracefully, but never had he been favored with such a partner before. Such grace and perfection of motion he had never seen, and with an unusual enjoyment in the dance, he was beginning another circuit of the room, when a sudden glance at his partner's face changed his intention. She was evidently half fainting. Whirling her easily out of the line of dancers, he drew her gently into the conservatory, and seated her where tall shrubs concealed her from the crowd. The fresher air, and the glass of water which he brought her, soon revived Miss Dennison, and she was able to thank him for his care.

"I do not often faint," she said. "I think the rooms must have been very warm."

Philip did not answer—he scarcely knew what she said. This was the first time that he had heard her speak. Why did that voice seem linked to all the memories that had haunted him through the evening?

"I must be dreaming," he thought, and, striving to rouse himself, he said, "I believe I was so fortunate as to find some of your property just now, Miss Dennison."

"Indeed," she replied, a faint color stealing back to her cheeks; "what may that be?" "I was not aware that I had lost anything."

Dr. Clayton drew the bunch of violets from his pocket. "Are not these yours?" he asked. "I fancied so, because they are like the others which loop your dress."

"O yes," she answered, with evidently assumed carelessness, and held out her hand for the flowers. She had removed her glove a moment before, to take the glass of water, and as Philip extended his bouquet, his glance fell upon a ring that she wore. It was a single sapphire, cut into the semblance of a violet.

The ring he had had made for May Barclay! Surely the same! Yet how came it on Miss Dennison's hand?

"May!" he gasped, in his first astonishment. Then partially recovering himself, and averting his eyes, that this stranger might not read all his love and sorrow in them, he continued, more quietly, "Forgive me, Miss Dennison, but your ring reminded me of one that I long ago gave to a very dear friend—"

"And this was given me by a very dear friend," answered his companion, faintly.

And he was so engrossed by his own emotions that he did not heed her tone.

"Dare I hope that it is the same—you would not think the question strange if you could know how I have searched for her. But no—she would never have parted with my ring, unless—"

"Philip!" exclaimed a voice that thrilled his heart.

He turned to see Miss Dennison standing beside him—but Miss Dennison no longer. The stately beauty seemed transformed, and it was once more his sweet shy May who gazed upon him, with her whole soul in those beautiful eyes.

"Philip!" she said again. "Do you not know me?"

It was well the tall shrubs shut out all intruders, for such a rapturous meeting should have no witnesses.

It was long before they were calm enough for one to give and the other to understand the history of their separation.

The day after writing the last letter which Philip had ever received, May was astonished by the arrival of the strange lady, who proved to be a sister of her mother's, of whom May had heard, but, as she had always lived abroad, had never seen.

She had merely intended to call upon her niece, and leave her at the farmhouse; but, finding Mr. Barclay dying, and being struck with May's beauty, she had stayed, as Philip had been told, arranged all affairs, and taken May with her.

Learning from some words dropped by the dying man of May's engagement, she had at once determined to put an end to it, having even then planned how she would educate May, and have her make a brilliant match. She was far too wise to offer any open opposition. On the contrary, she listened to May's praise of Philip, and offered to send her servant to the office with the letter which the sorrowing girl wrote him, telling of her grandfather's death, her new-found relative, and begging him to come to her before her departure. It was not until years after, when her aunt lay on her death-bed, that May discovered that neither that nor any of her subsequent letters had ever been allowed to reach him, and that every precaution had been used that he should gain no clue to her whereabouts from the agent or lawyer.

In every other respect her aunt had been devotedly kind to her; had formally adopted

her, which was the reason why she was known as Miss Dennison; and after three years of travel in foreign countries, had died, leaving her sole heiress to all her vast wealth.

Left to herself, May had made what inquiries she could about Philip. Her aunt, having studiously encouraged her to believe him false, and endeavored to persuade her to accept some one of the brilliant offers made her, had, when she found herself dying, confessed the whole, and in the sudden revulsion of feeling May found that so far from forgetting her lover, she had unconsciously cherished her love through all those lonely years.

Mrs. Forrester was an old friend of Mrs. Dennison, and on her death had cordially offered a home to May; but, led by the hope of finding Philip, May had at first preferred to visit some old friends who resided in the city where he had formerly lived, and had but just joined Mrs. Forrester.

"I saw you as you sat so sadly by the window," she concluded, "and recognized you at once. Your memory was not so faithful as mine."

"Say rather," returned Philip, "that it was so faithful, so overpoweringly faithful, that it left me no opportunity to use my eyes or my ears. The little violets seemed like a messenger from you."

"And well they might," she rejoined, "when I laid them by your hand as I passed. I saw your preoccupied look—I hoped and believed you were thinking of me—and I laid the little token there to whisper of my presence. Do you not remember the song—

"If the breath of a flower
O'er her heart hath no power?"

"But it had power in this case," whispered her lover. "Blessings on the little flowers which have brought me back my darling."

VIRGINIAN JASMINE.

BY CATHERINE EARNSHAW.

Vance Nugent was impatiently tossing the magazines on the table of a South-Square boarding-house. It was a quiet place, torpid, without brightness. He was waiting to carry a far-away relative of his to his home, — Glamis Manor. She was going to teach in a neighboring institute; and, as he happened here, his mother had said that she could ride with him so much better than in "that tormentingly slow coach."

He heard steps approaching, and looked up with a vexed frown on his face. He had waited half an hour, and had imbibed the idea that his relative was forty, and very deliberate. He was disappointed. A girl of twenty four or five came in. He was impressed by her face. It was her eyes that startled him. All heaven was there for one to whom she chose to reveal it. Nugent did not speak: he rose and looked at her, hoping she would thus meet his gaze for an indefinite length of time. A crimson color came over her brunette face. She said hesitatingly, —

"Did you ask for Miss Faulkner?"

"I beg your pardon," the gentleman said, with a hazy idea that he ought to beg par-

don for something. "Yes: I did ask for Miss Faulkner. Is she coming?"

"That is my name. Have you any business with me? I would not have kept you waiting, only I have but just received word that you wished to see me."

There was just a little of embarrassed flutter in her face and manner. She did not look at him much as she talked.

Nugent felt a triumphant thrill that this was the girl he was going to carry home. He sat down, and said, —

"My mother has corresponded with you, for I am *Julia Nugent's son*." Here he bowed gracefully and respectfully. "You have consented to accept her invitation to make our place your home while you are in the institute, and, as I was in town with a carriage, I promised myself the pleasure of taking you home with me. You were to go today, were you not?"

How attractive to him were her uncertain eyelids, the coming and going of her cheeks' vividness, and that half-reserve which did not, however, prevent her from speaking in clear, full music. She answered, —

"Yes: but I might inconvenience you somewhat. Were you going this morning?"

"Any time today," he answered.

He had thought, when the forty-years-of-age idea had been in the ascendant, that he should go in the forenoon at any rate.

"Well, if you will wait till afternoon, I shall be happy to avail myself of your offer."

She rose as she spoke.

Nugent supposed he must go. He took his hat; then put it down. He stepped toward her, and held out his hand, saying, —

"Miss Faulkner, I suppose we are some sort of cousins. I have heard my mother speak of you often. Let us shake hands upon our relationship."

The young man was very kind to the girl. His eyes were honest, as well as searching and handsome. She felt it so. She gave him her hand, but she could not raise her eyes; they were too full of tears. Nugent saw that, and an earnest, admiring kindness came in his heart. He gave the hand a faint pressure, and, saying he would call again, he went out.

They did not love each other then, but, should they never meet again, there had something entered into the lives of both which had never been there before, — which would be a thing of sweetness and pain to look back upon. They might easily forget each other, but they would always remember the unaccustomed feelings of that time, as we remember the perfume of some flower, though we have forgotten the hue, even the name of the bloom itself.

Ethel Faulkner did not know, or had forgotten, the existence of any son of her mother's relative and friend. Had she ever seen his face before, her recollection would have been vivid. She was going to teach to maintain herself. Her father had been a country gentleman of wealth, but he had died impoverished and in debt. Everybody had died to whom she was united by near ties of blood or affection.

The pleasure of riding through the gardens of England in the luxurious carriage of wealth forcibly called back to her the days when she had ridden so with her father, and had prided herself upon being the little lady of the manor.

Nugent glanced at her face; its look of introspection and memory forbade him to speak. When he was so intensely conscious that she was beside him, he wished that she might think of him. He must see her all he could before they got home; then

he would have to shut down a high, strong wall of duty; but he was not going to do it till he must.

Casting that thought back from him, he turned to Ethel, resolved that for this day, at least, he would be to her as his heart prompted, — so kind that his words wanted but little of tenderness, yet still were not tender.

It was a chilly morning in April. Riding against the wind was very uncomfortable. He stooped and pulled the robes more tightly about her; then he held them in place, with his arm just touching the back of her heavy cloak. She turned to him suddenly. He caught her glance with eyes too full of his heart. She said, —

"I was going to ask if that long ridge there was one of the Roman relics about which I have heard so much, or only something of a later day?"

He smiled.

"You are over young for an antiquarian. Yes, that is purely Roman, they say. I think this befogged country a poor place for those Italians. They could not have become naturalized. Who could fancy Bacchantes sporting here? Even our woods forbid us to associate nymphs with their shades. Everything is precision and regularity."

"But do not forget our oaks. Surely we offer the Hamadryades a home. Did you never hear their shrieks of pain when the woodman has felled an oak?"

Ethel looked up with an enthusiastic, childish face, and then blushing laughed at her earnestness.

"Still the trees must go down in spite of their resident spirits. An opportunity for moralizing a little, which I see by your face you will not do," he said, looking down at her.

"I never do it — aloud," she replied, turning away her face,

"Do not turn indifferent eyes upon the home of all my past days: there it lies."

He pointed to the manor, whose roofs and gables could be seen on a neighboring eminence. Ethel looked at it with a feeling that made her cheeks grow a little pale beneath the ruddy tinge of riding. She liked its trees. Its long line of poplars she could just trace by their tops: she fancied they lined the approach up the lawn.

"An ancestral residence truly," she said, after her survey. "You love it?"

"Yes: more than I can tell," he said, with emphasis. And then after a pause: "There is company there now; perhaps you knew?"

Ethel was sorry. It was sufficiently embarrassing, in her dependent situation, to meet Mrs. Nugent alone; but, with the addition of company, she actually dreaded it. Mrs. Nugent had objected to her teaching, but still extended her offer of a home; and, when Ethel discovered that a situation in the Glamis Institute was at present the only opportunity for her, she could not but avail herself of the invitation still urged upon her to stay at the manor. So Ethel asked, a little timidly, —

"Are the visitors relatives of your mother, or only acquaintances?"

"Acquaintances. You may have heard of Helen Trevyllan?"

"I have sometimes seen a description of her toilet in fashionable papers," Ethel answered, with something of sarcasm in her voice.

Some sort of change came over Nugent's face, whether of pride or some other feeling Ethel could not tell.

Presently he said, —

"It is the same. Miss Trevyllan, her mother and brother are our visitors at present. Here we are at the lodge. I wish you all happiness at Glamis Manor," he added, as they passed through the gate and under the meeting poplars.

Mrs. Nugent met them in the hall. Ethel saw why Vance had handsome brown hair and eyes, — his mother had such. The kind and the proud were so mingled in her demeanor that Ethel was more charmed than she had ever been by any younger lady. At dinner she saw the Trevyllans. They were of that manner and face that, without the accessories of dress and surroundings, would have instantly suggested the word "aristocratic." The blood of the true Trevyllans came purely down for many generations.

The attentive kindness of Mrs. Nugent to Ethel compelled a sort of attention and respect to her from the visitors. All of Ethel's pride, that which had made her too haughty in the days of her prosperity, came to her aid now, and she passed through the ordeal of a survey from Miss Trevyllan's beautiful blue eyes with unblenched forehead and steady face. She saw that Vance Nugent and his fair guest were betrothed,

and she thought them fine pictures of English manhood and womanhood. Of John Trevyllan she only thought that his figure was very graceful, and his address deferential.

A few mornings after, she met him on her way to school. He turned back, and walked to the door of the institute with her. She liked him: his native sense and gentlemanly delicacy both delighted and astonished her. She talked with but very little reserve, and was half sorry that they reached the school so soon. She felt no hesitation in saying, —

"Would you like to come in and see the progress of my labors?"

He stood on the steps, with his hat in his hand.

"If you will allow me, tomorrow I will do so."

He bowed almost to the hand he held. Ethel looked over his head, and saw Nugent coming along the walk. He glanced at her, and she thought the expression of his face was one of vexation or pain. She went to the school-room wondering about it.

There grew between herself and Trevyllan a certain acquaintance, — almost an intimacy. The Trevyllans were to stop nearly all summer, and Ethel found before half the season was through that she viewed Trevyllan in the light of a valued friend. She had not noticed the pleased, surprised glances Mrs. Nugent had at first directed toward them. She had come almost to forget her poverty, and Helen Trevyllan herself did not walk about the old manor with more of the unconsciousness of independence than did Ethel Faulkner.

Of Vance Nugent she had not seen anything of that which she saw on their ride to his home. No more of that thoughtful gallantry was offered to her. He only noticed her politely and hospitably, — and that was sufficient, and certainly all he could spare from his devotions to his betrothed. There was but one exception to this custom.

The whole family were in the habit of riding out in the twilight of the warm days, the ladies usually in a carriage, the two gentlemen on horseback. Nugent, with a persistence that Ethel began finally to remark, always handed her to the carriage, and assisted her to alight. He had almost rudely superseded Trevyllan several times. Some slight thing in his manner gained Ethel's sympathies. They were hardly conscious of it, but both of them came to

look forward to the time in their daily rides when their hands would be clasped just for one moment. He did not care how Helen alighted; he did not seem to see her then.

One soft July night the carriage came round before Nugent appeared; the ladies were seated, and Trevyllan mounted, waiting his arrival. When he did appear, Ethel, who could not help watching his face, noticed a striving of feeling upon it. She could not listen to Trevyllan, who rode by her window, and finally she leaned back and tacitly refused to take part in the conversation. They were going to a neighboring town to purchase some trifle of Helen's bridal outfit, for the wedding was expected to take place in a few months. Nugent, on the other side of the carriage, was gay and brilliant. When they arrived home he sprang to the door, and gallantly waited upon the ladies, all but Ethel. It was a dim, starlight night of warmth. He seemed to forget her, for, just as she rose to descend, he half shut the door, and stood with it in his hand, while the company ran laughing and talking into the hall. Then, as if suddenly remembering, he opened the door, glanced at her as she stood ready to step out, then up at the house once more; then he suddenly sprang into the carriage, and told the coachman to drive slowly through the north park and back.

Ethel sat down astonished, but with a vague feeling of delight running through her amazement. This freak of Nugent's almost deprived her of speech. He sat down opposite. Ethel looked furtively at his face; it was turned toward her. She could see in the dim light its pale color and the entreating look of those burning eyes. Oppressed by the beating of her heart, and feeling herself growing incapable of cool composure, Ethel turned to the carriage window and leaned her forehead against the glass. She could feel those eyes, heating, diffusing their light through her soul. What should she do? Why would he look at her so? She raised her hand and shaded her face. At last he said, —

"Why did you not allow me to help you into the carriage tonight?"

The question and the tone, unreasonable as both were, told how dearly he prized that instant of the pressure of her hand. She felt it so. She spoke low and tremulously.

"You know you were away when we were ready to start."

"Trevyllan walks with you, talks with you, and tonight you gave him your hand. I saw him from my window hold it in both his a moment before he put you in. Did n't he?"

"Yes."

Ethel felt that she ought to freeze or repel this man who was talking so strangely almost on the eve of his marriage, but she was utterly incapable of doing it. Her own heart answered too fully to the anguish of love and strife in his. They sat in silence: it was the strangest ride she ever knew. The carriage now turned into the drive to the door. He bent toward her.

"Ethel!"

Everything of love and passion was in that word. Summoning her failing resolution, she drew back, and exclaimed, —

"Mr. Nugent, you act strangely. Why do you talk like this?"

She opened the door and sprang out while the horses were yet moving. They had been absent but a short time, and had not been missed. She went to her room, but she would not stay there, and thus let him know that she had been so much affected. She went down soon, and was thankful to be engaged by Trevyllan in a game of backgammon. Nugent did not come in until long afterward, and then only to excuse himself and go back to his chamber.

Ethel went to no more rides after that. She was possessed by a constant terror lest she should by any accident find herself alone with Nugent. She was obliged to own to herself that she feared her own impulses as much as she did him. In the solitude of nights — those humid, warm nights of summer — his face and voice, as they were on that evening, came back so vividly as to give her an almost insane fear of what she should do or say should he ever look like that again. She hurried to and from her school: it seemed to her that she would meet him at every corner. But he never tried to see her; sometimes he would not look at her when he spoke to her. Something would come to his eyes when turned to her face that she ought not to see, that ought not to be there. Meantime their mutual reserve was noticed with delight by Trevyllan. He had half feared that Ethel did not think of him with that warmth of feeling that always came to him when with her. She was of good family, and he did n't care if she was poor. Her coldness to Nu-

gent gave more frankness to her intercourse with Trevyllan. He was beginning to think of offering her his hand and the town-house and country-seat of the Trevyllans. But for all he felt himself her superior in the eyes of the world, he experienced more doubt and trepidation than he had ever thought himself capable of where ladies were concerned.

It was in the last of August, and was Ethel's vacation. She went out in the early part of the afternoon to call on a pupil in whom she had become interested. While she was closing the park gate, Trevyllan came up. There was that in his manner that put her on her guard instantly, and he would as soon have thought of declaring love to a lady carved in stone as to Ethel that day. He left her at the house of her friend, and sauntered home. He wondered all the afternoon when she would come home, and made up his mind half a dozen times to go and meet her. Nugent was lounging at Helen's feet: it was oppressively dull in the drawing-room, so he went into the library. The hours passed away, and she did not come to dinner. In the evening a terrific thunder-storm came on. Mrs. Nugent suddenly asked, —

"Where is Ethel? I thought she would be here long before this."

"Is she away? I fancied she was mewed up in her room," Vance said, indifferently.

"She went to Crofton's some time ago. She must have decided to stay all night."

The fear that she might be out alone in the storm made Nugent sure that she was not going to remain. He rose, and walked out into the hall with the slow step of one who has not fully decided where to go. Once in the hall, he wrapped himself in great-coat with eager haste. He was sufficiently thoughtful to take a shawl, should he be so fortunate as to find her. The rain came in swift sheets, pierced every few moments by lightning that shot across Nugent's eyes like near fire. He walked fast, with a heat in his veins which he felt congenial with this lightning.

He soon came to Crofton's. They said Miss Faulkner left there some time before sunset, and had said that she was going to explore the first shaft of the deserted coal mine. It was only a little way, and she had always wanted to go there.

Nugent walked out into the storm again. If he could only find her, no one would be

near, — he must look into her eyes once more, and then go and be married to some one else. That thought came with terrible bitterness. It had been with him constantly for weeks past.

He stopped at a cottage near the entrance of the mine and procured a lantern. He went on through the first gallery, but did not find her. Then he came to the diverging, winding paths. Which should he take? He stood still and shouted "Ethel!" No sound came back but the hollow, choked echo. He tried again, but there was no answer. He hurried along a shaft to the right; it turned, twisted, ran into others. He went just as they came, without thought, for it would do no good to think, — he could judge nothing of which way she took. He stood still a moment to breathe; his headlong haste and fevered spirit were almost suffocating him. She might have fallen, it was so dark, into one of the deep pools of stagnant water that lay blackly in several places of the mine.

O God! This was torment! This was dreadful! He must find her. He went on: he saw the distant gleam of something white. It was her handkerchief. She had been there then. He pressed it to his lips; he fancied he inhaled the fragrance of her breath, so strongly did it remind him of her. He turned a sharp corner to the left, and Ethel started up from a stone on which she had been sitting, after a fruitless search for a path that led to the opening.

Nugent uttered an exclamation so ardent and impatient that the pale face of Ethel crimsoned for a moment. She advanced a step, and commenced a sentence.

"Do not speak until I get to you," he said; and, setting down the lantern, he came to her and wrapped the shawl about her. She trembled, not wholly from cold.

"Now sit down," he said.

She sank down on the stone again, and he sat at her feet. The light of the lantern shone full on their faces, he had placed it so. He took her hands, and looked up at her face, — into eyes whose light Ethel could not deny him now. It was the first supreme moment of their lives. He drank the draught of those wonderful eyes. The exquisite thrills that palpitated in his heart wrote their language on his face, and Ethel saw it. At last her eyes lowered, and a slight tremor vibrated through her frame. She wanted to withdraw her hands, but

that firm clasp was inexpressibly dear to her.

"O Ethel!" he said, without moving his eyes from her face.

She became suddenly still. The penetrating power of that voice she could never forget.

"Ethel, I love you!" There was passionate determination in his tone. "I love you!"

He lingered over the words with musical intonation.

Again Ethel looked at him; it was beyond her power to prevent her eyes meeting his. He read all he wished to know there, but he must hear it too. He bowed his head to her hand, and kissed it softly; then looking at her, he said, —

"Say it, Ethel. I must hear it tonight; and I cannot be so wretched hereafter as I should be if I never heard it. Say it."

"I might as well," Ethel murmured, bending her head slightly as she said, scarcely above her breath, — "I love you too, dear Vance."

"Once more! once!" he whispered, with trembling lips.

"It is true. God forgive me, but I cannot help it."

She withdrew her hands and covered her face. He sat quietly a moment, then he half rose, and gently removed her hands.

"This hour of tempest is ours," he said; "then be to me for this time as though no tempest awaited us outside. Let me see your face all the time. Do not speak of right or wrong. Only let us talk as though you were happy in the love I give you."

A quivering-lipped smile irradiated her face for a moment.

"Oh, if I were only free!" he cried, with the anguish of his heart in his words. "But I *shall* be! I *will* be!"

"Do not talk — do not talk like this," she said, speaking with effort. "I think the storm is abating; we must try and find the entrance."

Even as she spoke a tremendous concussion shook the earth above them. Ethel felt as though no storm could be so fierce, no lightning so dreadful, but that she should like to wander in their wildness. Her eyes grew phosphorescent as the electricity that played over the world. It seemed to her as though her soul must leave her in the writhing conflict of feeling that possessed it.

"I must go away!" she cried, rising from her seat: "I cannot stay here."

He rose to her side.

"Am I then so disagreeable to you?" he asked.

She looked at him with dilated, appealing eyes.

"You know it is because you are not disagreeable that I want to go. Will the storm never cease?"

"I hope not," he said, suddenly passing his arms about her, and speaking with his lips touching her forehead.

They stood quiet for a while, until the thunder became less frequent, and sounded far off. Ethel stepped toward the lantern, and said, in a hard, still voice, —

"Now, if you please, conduct me to the entrance. We can go home with safety now, I think."

Nugent did not speak. He wrapped his coat about him, and led the way through the last passage he had passed. He had taken very little notice of the direction, and they walked on in a vague sort of a way for some time, but finally came to the opening.

The rocks and trees were dripping with the rain, but the clouds were moving in broken, black masses, and the stars shone out between their edges. The moon was coming just above the roof of the manor. They had not been in the mine more than two hours.

They walked together just as two strangers would have done. Just as they gained the steps to the door, Nugent stopped and took from his bosom the handkerchief.

"May I have it?" he asked.

"No, — yes," Ethel faltered, seeing the shade come over his face at the first word.

They went into the house. Nugent entered the drawing-room a few moments after he reached home, and remarked that Miss Faulkner had been so unwise as to go to the mine from Crofton's, and he had just come home with her.

Mrs. Nugent was sorry Ethel had been so thoughtless, and that was all the notice taken of the event; only Trevyllan thought Nugent's face strangely pale, and his eyes strangely luminous, but concluded it was the excitement of the storm, though storms never affected *him* in that way.

The next week the Trevyllans left Glamis Manor for their own country-seat. Mrs. Nugent went with them; they asked Ethel to go, but of course she could not, as her

school would commence soon. Helen had graciously requested her to put by that tiresome routine and go, but Ethel would rather not.

The marriage had been arranged to take place in the middle of October. It was rather strange that Nugent suddenly became desirous of going to the continent for a few weeks. He accompanied the Trevyllans home, and sped directly across the channel. He would get some gift in Paris that would be worthy his bride, he said. So Ethel was left in the manor. She was unspeakably relieved that it was so. She tried to procure a situation in another part of the country, but was unsuccessful. At Glamis Manor she must stay some time longer at least.

One day there came a respectful note from John Trevyllan. He had asked Mrs. Nugent's approbation, and he now begged the gift of her hand. He received a letter in return, as respectful and far more grateful than his had been, but it declined his offer. Ethel did not refuse him without a great deal of thought. The prospect would have been more tempting had it opened before she had seen Vance Nugent. Though he was separated from her, she had no heart to think of a life with any one else. An expostulatory letter came from Mrs. Nugent. Ethel was touched by the sincere kindness of the epistle, — it was so like the writer, — but she could not do as Mrs. Nugent would like. The girl was wretched and despairing. Vance could travel, could try to distract and divide his thoughts by hurrying from one scene to another, but she must stay there and be pained by the slow torture that afflicted her every day. She remembered so accurately the words that had passed that night in the mine; she could not help sometimes remembering their sweetness and forgetting their pain. The thought that they came to him too, with the same passionate powerfulness, seemed to connect the two more closely and indissolubly. Surely God had destined them for each other. Such thoughts were wrenched with many thrills of agony from her heart, while at the same time they were nourished with a fond, fierce delight by Nugent, as he walked solitary through the streets of Paris.

After Mrs. Nugent had been absent three weeks, Ethel received another letter from her. It said:—

"I do not know why I tell you this, un-

less it is my belief in your good sense and kind heart, and my desire for some sort of sympathy or advice. Yesterday I received a strange note from my son. He inclosed a note for me to read and give to Miss Trevyllan, to the effect that strong reasons had induced him to request that their engagement might be cancelled, as he no longer deemed himself worthy of her hand. I find myself in a very embarrassing situation. I have not yet delivered the letter. I fear that Vance is fascinated by some Parisian beauty, and thinks for a moment that he no longer desires a marriage which once promised him so much happiness. I cannot but think he will regret having written so hastily, and so I have not yet the courage to inform Miss Trevyllan. What renders my situation still more unpleasant, is the presence of young Lord Greville, who has come here from Bath, and who pays the most marked attention to Miss Trevyllan. I think she should repulse him, but I do not remonstrate, as her mother encourages her. Write to me, my dear Ethel. I shall despatch a letter to Vance, requesting him to return. The future of Helen and my son seems very uncertain. There is some talk of the whole party here returning to Glamis Manor; as Lord Greville expressed a wish to go over our hunting-grounds, I, of course, tendered him our hospitality."

Ethel could not analyze her sensations as she read this. She had not thought that Nugent would make any effort to break his engagement. His ideas of honor were so nice that such a thing as this he wished to do had appeared nearly impossible to Ethel. She remembered the determination with which he had said he would be free. With a great effort, she threw off for a few moments the thoughts of him and his betrothed. She fell to dreading the arrival of company. She did not expect them so soon, for the next day the housekeeper received orders to air the chambers and prepare for guests.

They came a day or two after, all but John Trevyllan. Lord Greville was a handsome fellow, who liked pretty girls, cigars, and horses, and who seemed to have quite a strong will of his own.

She saw very little of him, for when she was at home he was riding or walking most of the time with Helen. She saw that the beauty was flattered and pleased by his devotion. Ethel decided that Miss Trevyllan

had never loved Vance, — not with her love. She did not know how subject to petty ambition is all of affection in the composition of fashionable women. Mrs. Nugent informed Ethel that she expected Vance every day. Had Ethel known of one single place to which she could go, she would have resigned her place and departed. But she had sense enough not to go without any fixed purpose.

Nugent returned one day while the party were at dinner. He coolly saluted those present, excepting Lord Greville; he stared somewhat impudently at him. His lordship thought it better not to notice it, so he sipped his wine unconsciously. Mrs. Nugent hastened to say, —

"Lord Clifford Greville, Vance. I thought you knew him."

"Never had that honor," muttered Nugent, bowing low as he spoke.

Greville softly said something about being "most happy," and then turned to talk to Helen.

Nugent did not look half so exasperated as circumstances seemed to warrant.

"You have not spoken to Ethel, Vance," said his mother, in a tone of reproof at his rudeness.

"I beg your pardon, mother, but I have bowed to her," he said, gravely. "Ask her if I have not."

Lord Greville at this moment looked searchingly and suspiciously at Ethel. The glance made her color slightly and drop her eyes. An idea had come to Greville. He looked at the subdued but unquiet face of Nugent, and was quite sure that his idea was correct. It was curious that this superficial man of the world should have been the first to discover this love, but long study in reading faces had made him expert.

"If this engagement is broken," he thought, "there will be no bleeding hearts," and he redoubled his attentions to Miss Trevyllan, on whose face he thought he could trace the ill-concealed expression of pique. She was cooler than usual to him the rest of the day. The presence of Nugent discomposed her somewhat, though nothing could be less watchful or more nonchalant than he appeared.

Ethel lingered in the dining-room one morning after breakfast. She was interested in a puzzle Greville had proposed to Helen and herself. She was trying to solve it when Nugent came in. So accustomed

had she become to reading his face, and so piercing is the perception of love, that Ethel saw immediately that Nugent was pained by something. Forgetting the puzzle, and everything else but him, she could not stay there, subject to the scrutinizing glances of Greville. She went into the library, and, sitting down by the table, she leaned her head upon it, overwhelmed by a sense of how powerless had been her efforts to subdue the passion that burned within her.

In a short time Vance came to the door; his face lighted as he saw she was there. He came and bent over her bowed head.

"At length I see you again. Ethel, I am here; look at me."

She raised her head, but kept her eyes concealed by her hand.

"When did you receive this?" he asked, laying Trevyllan's letter on the table.

She started, and exclaimed, —

"Where did you get that?"

"I found it by the lodge gate. You should keep your epistles of love more securely."

"I should, indeed," she said, in a low voice, without looking up.

She put the letter in her pocket.

"Do you value that?" he asked, in a tone that promised an outburst of furious jealousy.

Ethel could not speak.

He stood silent for a moment, then he walked to the door and turned the key in the lock. He came back and put his hand on her head, saying, in a voice as sweet as a woman's, —

"O my love — my best — are you going to tell me that you have accepted Trevyllan?"

That silvery sadness was something so different from what his first hot tone indicated that Ethel's eyes filled with tears that were not wholly unhappy. She struggled for her voice. At last she said, —

"I have refused him; but you are none the less bound."

A transparent splendor came over the face to which Ethel's eyes were turned.

"I am bound by nothing which I cannot break. It were hard for love like mine to find an obstacle it could not surmount," he said. "You do not imagine that I love Helen Trevyllan. I never loved her. Now that you have taught me what that feeling is, I know that no other has ever inspired it. Having nothing but my name to offer

Miss Trevyllan, I shall not marry her. I command myself to wait a while. I have deferred our intended marriage. If I am not mistaken, she will prefer a coronet to an untitled man. If she will cancel our agreement, I shall be glad of it; otherwise I shall do it myself. You do not know what I suffer in this situation of affairs between myself and our guest." He sank down on his knees, and crossed his hands on her lap. "When I see you every day, when I remember what you once told me, Ethel,—feeling all this, do you have any idea of the superhuman control I exercise? When you pass me, when your dress touches me, when I detect the perfume of your hair or breath, as I do a hundred times in the day, I wonder if you know how much it costs me to conceal the thrills, the fever which is consuming me. You do not know how I see you when I am not looking at you; how I never lose an expression of your face; how I think the cold, hard outline it has of late assumed may be the token of the coldness you are succeeding in teaching yourself to feel toward me. While I am without power to subdue my love, I am tormented by the fear that you will be successful in the effort. But you cannot conquer that which a feeling like mine must inspire. Can you, Ethel?"

With a hard duty that made her words quiver as they left her lips, Ethel said, —

"I had thought you the impersonation of honor; yet you talk of breaking your word to a woman. Even if no obstacle existed, how could I be sure your faith to me would be true?"

"Cruel! unkind!" he murmured. "You do not know the devotion of the heart you wound. You may have an affection for me, while I — I am intoxicated, — I die. More than that, I respect, I reverence you. I do not want your affection."

He rose from her feet and walked to the window. What woman could hear unanswered a doubt of her love while she felt it permeating her whole being?

She stood and rested her hands on the table, with her face toward Nugent.

"Vance!"

He turned. One look at that face, with its parted lips, its eyes of shadowy glory, was enough to dispel any mortal suspicion.

There came footsteps; they were coming to the library door. It was his mother. She must not find the room locked and sus-

pect anything. Nugent glided to the door, opened it, and disappeared, taking his mother on some pretext to the conservatory. Thus sheltered, Ethel gained her chamber.

Lord Greville proposed "that the company, including the young ladies, should go horseback to the race-course by Carleton Hill. The thing was to come off that very afternoon. Would they go?"

It was Ethel's weekly half-holiday, and she assented eagerly to the proposal. Miss Trevyllan gave her acquiescence with a well-bred appearance of indifference. Nugent would go, of course. There were some fine horses to be tried, Greville said.

Nugent replied, —

"Yes: I hope these two ladies will mount the horses I bought last, that beautiful couple of milk-white steeds. They are warranted gentle. Will you try them?"

"With pleasure," Helen said.

Ethel did not reply, but she was sure she could manage almost any specimen of horse-flesh. She felt that reckless tensing of nerves that will dare and do a great deal in the physical line.

After a great deal of chat on Helen's part, and wonder if the horse was perfectly safe, they started as the sun reached high noon. At first they rode four abreast, but, as the road narrowed, Miss Trevyllan and Lord Greville started ahead, with a gayly waved defiance to follow flung back to Nugent and Ethel. They did follow close behind for a time, but at length their horses slackened their speed, though still keeping very near their leaders. The two might as well have not been together for all the conversation that passed between them. They were very attentive to their horses, and the animals, feeling keenly the bright autumn air, pranced and curveted with a high spirit that their riders tried in vain to imitate.

The trotting-grounds were crowded with equestrians and pedestrians, and noisy with bands of music. Ethel's horse became very much awake, and very attentive to everything around, but showed no further signs of uneasiness. Ethel was an expert and daring rider, and Nugent's half-awakened fears were quieted when he saw how she sat and guided her horse. They pressed forward to the position Greville and his companion had gained, and the four sat watching the preparations for the trial of speed.

Greville had left the party for a short time to pay his respects to some acquaintances in another part of the ground. Nugent had been anxiously watching the face of Miss Trevyllan's horse. It seemed to him that the animal was getting frightened.

The first two heats had been run, and the applause had not yet subsided, when a powerful black horse was brought on to go over the course. Its depressed ears and fiery eyes told of a vicious disposition. As the two equine competitors and their riders took their places, a chorus of instrumental music sounded out. The black horse snorted, reared, threw his rider like a feather from his back, and darted across the intervening space toward the spot where Nugent's company stood. It leaped the slight barrier that separated the crowd from the course. His long, flowing tail almost flashed across the eyes of Miss Trevyllan's horse. That lightning-like exodus, and the moving, frightened throng, inspired her horse with a sort of fury. It sped on in the track cleared by the black horse with a speed that told how unmanageable it was become. Nugent was mounted on a horse on whose fleetness and endurance he relied. He saw that Ethel's horse was completely under her control, and he spurred on after Helen with a haste that astonished the gaping multitude.

Ethel was in no mood to stay there, and her steed needed no urging to follow. She saw that Helen was being carried straight on the road that terminated in an abrupt descent toward the sea. Would Vance stop her before she reached the end? She could see that he suddenly turned off to the right; she understood that he wished to come in ahead of Helen by a path that led to the same road.

On Ethel flew; her blood surged in heated waves round her heart; she felt winged as the air through which she rushed. Her excitement made her exhilarated and almost happy. It seemed an age since she lost sight of both riders. Her horse increased his speed in answer to her urging. She turned a slight curve round a clump of woods, and just before the descent she saw Helen lying on the grass, and Nugent, dismounted, was bending over her. She rode up within a few paces of them. Helen was insensible, but she had only fainted, Ethel thought. Vance looked up at Ethel with a welcome in his eyes.

"Come here," he said.

She jumped from her horse and came. She withdrew the heavy gauntlets from Miss Trevyllan's hands and chafed the fingers. A slender ring of exquisite workmanship was broken. Helen opened her eyes with a confused stare. She put her hand on her ring, and said, brokenly, —

"Clifford, I have broken the ring you gave me: I pulled so hard at the bridle."

"He can replace it, I think," Nugent said, his face radiant through its paleness.

The voice half recalled her.

"I believe I am not hurt. Where is he?" she said, raising herself on her arm.

"I don't know where he is. He did n't know that your horse ran."

She was conscious now, for a painful blush revived her face from its whiteness. Finally she looked up and said, —

"You know now, if you have not suspected before. I owe you too much gratitude to marry you. "Will you release me?"

"It will afford me pleasure to do so," Nugent said, with his glance fixed upon Ethel's face.

Miss Trevyllan looked up surprised; she saw that look, and breathed a long, relieved sigh.

Greville smiled complacently when Helen described the scene to him. Perhaps he might have been better pleased had he achieved his triumph in direct opposition to Nugent; but Miss Trevyllan's face was a splendid one for Lady Greville to possess, and he liked her quite as well as he ever did anything.

One time Vance and Ethel stood in the conservatory at the manor. There was a beautiful moisture in her eyes, for Mrs. Nugent had just been talking to her in a sweet, kind way, which carried her back to a childhood which had been blessed by a mother. Before she left them, Mrs. Nugent said, —

"To your heart I leave my son. You two alone know whether your love will survive the waves of time."

Now Ethel stood by Nugent's side amid the sea of silver silence. He turned to the flowers around them, and drew a fragrant, trailing cluster from its home. He let it fall on her bowed head, and spoke softly, —

"Henceforth, on the anniversary of this day, I will give you Virginian jasmine, because ever since I saw you my inmost self has acknowledged you '*Soul of my Soul*.'"

THE HEIRESS AND HER GUARDIAN.

A TALE OF ENGLISH COUNTRY LIFE.

BY MRS. H. LOVETT CAMERON.

[*This Story was commenced in the November Number of the Magazine.*]

CHAPTER XIX.

FIVE YEARS AFTER.

FIVE years after! O blissful license of the story-teller, to whom it is allowed thus to make free with Father Time! Five years of weariness, of dullness, of disappointment! What would not some of us give to be rid of five years with as many words!

Only think of it! Five hot stuffy summers, made unbearable perchance with toilings in close city rooms all day, and with harder toilings still in west-end ballrooms by night—five biting winters of nipping frosts and Christmas bills—five backward springs of drizzling rains and driving east winds! Think of all the vexations, bodily and spiritual, that five years must inevitably bring to all of us, and then say whether you would not gladly shake them off your memory like a night's bad dream, and wake to begin afresh—whether you would not joyfully wipe off old scores, old griefs, old sins, and, with new hopes and new chances, begin again to write down the story of your life upon a blank and unsullied page.

O Rip Van Winkle, most blessed among men, how gladly would some of us follow your example, and outsleep, since we can scarcely manage to outlive, the unloveliness of some of the years of our lives!

Well, to the story-teller it is allowed to do this wonderful feat—to say that so many years out of the lives of those he has created shall be spirited away. Never mind how many—be it five, fifteen or fifty—he has but to say the word, and hey, presto! it is done. So it is that I begin again with—five years after!

Five years! during which my different characters have all been toiling painfully through the dullnesses and disappointments of uneventful lives, through which I will not condemn you, my reader, to follow them.

Now let us find them all out again, and see what changes these five years have

worked in them. It is five years, then—five years since Gretchen Rudenbach sat shivering in Sotherne parish church to watch a bridal party pass in and out, and to no one have these years brought greater changes than to the little music-teacher.

Gretchen is "Mdlle. Rudenbach," now, and well known to the fashionable and musical world. She has left the little house in Pimlico, and, carrying Miss Pinkin with her as companion and chaperone, has migrated to a semi-detached villa in Victoria Villas, Notting Hill.

It is highly improbable that Gretchen's musical talents, which were very considerable, and her industry, which was untiring, would alone have wrought this great improvement in her worldly prospects.

Seldom, indeed, do talent and industry, if unaccompanied by luck and interest, lead to the summit of any professional tree.

Gretchen's rise of fortune came about in this way. There was a certain Lady Caroline Skinflint, who lived in Wilton Crescent, and who was an acknowledged leader of the fashionable world. Lady Caroline was a younger daughter of the late Duke of Belgravia, which sufficiently explains the undoubtedness of her position. In her unmarried days, being unattractive in person and unpleasing in manner, she had been nobody in particular, for the maiden aunt even of a duke is not accounted of great social importance; but when, at the somewhat advanced age of thirty-eight, she escaped at length from the maternal thralldom of the Dowager Duchess, and took unto herself her bosom's lord in the person of the Honorable Theophilus Skinflint, whose brains were even if possible smaller than his income, Lady Caroline straightway became a very important personage indeed.

To be asked or not asked to Lady Caroline's musical soirees became almost a social test of respectability, whilst bland indeed were the smiles the world vouchsafed to those blessed few who were admitted into

the sacred inner circle of her *petits diners* or *reunions intimes*.

Lady Caroline gave herself out as a patron of music; not that she in reality knew or cared much about it, but that, as she would have told you, it is always necessary to take up something, and so she took up music.

In pursuance of these views, she gave annually four musical evening parties, into which she endeavored, and in a great measure succeeded, to cram a very large number of persons into very moderate-sized rooms, at the minimum of expenditure that was possible.

It was after sending out some hundred or so of cards for one of these entertainments that Lady Caroline cast about to seek for the utmost amount of cheap musical talent that she could lay hands upon wherewith to enter ain her invited guests.

Happening one day to run up into the drawing-room of her latest protegee and bosom friend *pro tem.*, Mrs. Harrington Spotts, whose pedigree was short but whose purse she found conveniently long, Lady Caroline discovered, not that lady herself, but her little girl, and, what was more to the purpose, the little girl's music-mistress, who was playing over a sonata of Beethoven to her pupil. Lady Caroline withdrew herself behind the portiere and listened, struck by the masterly touch of the performance.

"Brava! brava!" she cried, clapping her hands and coming forward into the room as the last chords sounded. "You play very nicely, young lady—who are you?"

"She is Miss Rudenbach, my music-governess," answered the juvenile daughter of the house of Harrington Spotts, whilst Gretchen rose blushing from the piano.

"Rudenbach? a German name, eh? I am Lady Caroline Skinflint—don't be afraid, my dear;" this was added with reassuring condescension, as though the mere sound of the patrician name were calculated to strike awe into the breast of a German music-teacher; but Gretchen, who, dreadful to relate, had never heard of her ladyship, was not particularly impressed either with awe or with admiration.

"What do you charge for playing at musical parties?" continued the lady, rushing at once to the point.

"I—I really don't know," stammered Gretchen, for she had never done such a thing in her life.

Lady Caroline was not blind to the chance thus presented to her.

"Ah, I see," she said; "you have never played out—ah! well, you are very young, and not of course by any means perfect in your art—that is not to be expected; but you have a good touch, and your playing pleases me. I am a patron of music, and am going to have a musical party next week, on the 14th; if you like to come and play at it for me, it would be a very good opening for you, and will probably get you several new pupils."

"Your ladyship is very kind, if you think I could play well enough," murmured Gretchen, gratefully and doubtfully.

"Well, of course, as you are not a regular professional, you must not expect me to pay you anything, but I will recommend you to all my friends; that is to say, if you play to my satisfaction—and you will get your supper." So for her supper Gretchen was engaged. "Recollect, you are to play as often as I want you to play, and let me have a list of the things you can do best by Monday at latest, that I may get my programmes printed."

And Lady Caroline went her way, and boasted to her friends and acquaintances of the wonderful young pianiste she had secured for the fourteenth. "Quite a second Arabella Goddard, I assure you," she said, "and with more feeling; she is considered the rising light in the musical world—quite young, and a perfect genius!"

By the fourteenth everybody was talking about the new star whose performances they were to listen to in Wilton Crescent, and whom of course nobody had ever heard of before. Lady Caroline chuckled to herself with delight when she reflected upon the piece of wonderful good fortune which had enabled her to discover this brilliant performer, and her own shrewdness in securing her services for nothing!

The evening arrived, and Gretchen, in her pearl gray merino, with the soft folds of a white muslin fichu up to her throat, and a simple little white flower in her hair, looking more Quaker-like and innocent than ever among all the bare shoulders and painted cheeks and golden-dyed hair of full-dressed Belgravia, and adding by her singularly modest appearance considerably to the effect she produced, sat down amid a dead silence to play her first piece.

She was not at all nervous, and she played

splendidly, quite surpassing even Lady Caroline's hopes of her; she felt herself upon her mettle, and was conscious that most of her future success as a musician probably depended upon how she acquitted herself on this occasion.

The result was beyond her expectations. There was a perfect storm of applause as she finished, and many people crowded round the piano to be introduced to her.

A great professional singer, whose kindness of heart is well known to be equal to her talent, and who was present "as a friend," which meant of course that she would probably volunteer to sing something for her hostess later on in the evening, spoke most kindly to our little Gretchen, and was so taken by her gentleness and simplicity that she became from that day forward one of her best and stanchest friends.

In point of fact, Gretchen's fortune was made. Engagements to play at evening parties, for which she soon learned to charge five guineas, flowed in upon her from all quarters; pupils, no longer little girls in their first stages, but grown-up young ladies, came to her in greater numbers than she could well manage to teach; and by-and-by she raised her terms to a guinea a lesson, and moved to her prettily-furnished villa at Notting Hill, where her own friends came to visit her, and Miss Pinkin no longer dared to snub her, or to prophesy evil of her.

And the best of it all for Lady Caroline Skinflint was that, remembering to whom she owed her prosperity, Gretchen Rudenbach always played at the parties of her patroness upon the same terms upon which she had on the first occasion engaged her; that is to say, for nothing—and her supper!

It was evening. Gretchen had finished her modest repast, and leaving Miss Pinkin to lock up the wine and to give sundry orders to a refractory housemaid, she had retired to her little flower-scented drawing-room.

The room was nearly dark, the windows wide open, and the white muslin curtains fluttered in the evening breeze; a bush of white lilac in the little suburban garden outside kept tapping against the panes, and filled the air with a delicious fresh scent. There was a flower-stand well filled in one corner, more flowers in vases on the mantelpiece, a general air of prettiness and comfort over the whole room. Gretchen

sat at the piano in the half-light, and played over some passages of the sonata that she was going to perform at a musical party that evening.

Some one came running up the steps of the house, opened the door, and, unannounced, stepped into the little drawing-room.

"Don't let me disturb you," said Cis Travers, just laying one hand for an instant on the musician's arm as he passed her, and then sinking down on to a sofa on the other side of the piano. And Gretchen, with a little nod, went on with her playing.

Cis Travers has altered considerably since we last saw him on his wedding-morning. He has grown much older and more manly-looking; and at the same time has lost the look of boyish frankness which was at that time a charm in his face, and which has been replaced by a peevish discontented expression which is scarcely pleasant to behold.

Gretchen played on to the end of her andante, whilst Cis lay with his feet on the sofa, and his hands thrown back behind his yellow head. When she had finished, she twisted herself round on the music-stool.

"What have you come to me for this evening?" she asked, in her gentle voice.

"O, worried to death as usual! My wife has gone to the opera—we had to dine at seven o'clock; fancy that in June! and it is twice a week at least that it happens. What is a man to do with himself, left all alone in an empty house at eight o'clock?"

"Why don't you go with Mrs. Travers, then?"

"I? my dear little girl! you know I detest it! The only music I like is yours, Gretchen," he added, stretching out his hand to her. Probably in the half-light Gretchen did not see it, for she made no responding movement.

"Still," she continued, gently, "it is a pity such a lovely woman as Mrs. Travers should always go out without her husband, alone—or with other men."

"Do not lecture me, Gretchen; I came here to be consoled, and not scolded. I am so fortunate in finding you at home, too."

"I shall not be able to stop long, I am afraid. I shall have to go and dress very soon. I am going out to a musical party. Is it nine o'clock yet?"

"Twenty minutes to—there's lots of time; don't be running away just yet. My life is

very lonely, and it does me good to talk to you. Juliet has her friends and her parties; she does not care a farthing what becomes of me. She never did care in the least about me—never from the first," added Cis, with irritation.

Gretchen made no answer; the fingers of her left hand ran lightly over the keys of the piano, and her lip quivered, unseen, in the darkening twilight. It was very sad to her to hear Cis talk like that. Although she had always loved this man, with all his weaknesses and follies, to which she was by no means blind, it gave her no pleasure to hear that he was not happy, and that the love he had once felt for his beautiful wife was turned into bitterness and peevish discontent.

Gretchen had one of those pure and unselfish natures that love goodness for its own sake. She would far rather have heard that Cis was perfectly happy in his domestic relations than have had to listen to all the miserable complaints which testified to such flattering confidence in herself.

"Do you remember," continued Cis, presently, "do you remember the old days when I used to meet you in Wigmore Street, and we walked together to Bloomsbury Square?"

"I remember very well," answered Gretchen, to whom every one of those interviews was as distinctly present as if they had happened only yesterday.

"I think I was a fool in those days!" said Cis, with a sigh; "I imagined myself violently in love with a woman who has done nothing but scorn me all my life, and all the while there was an affectionate little heart close by which I might have had for the asking, I believe—eh, Gretchen?"

"What rubbish you are talking!" cried Gretchen, jumping up so hurriedly that she upset the music-stool, and shutting up the piano with a slam. It was a mercy that there was too little light to see how scarlet her cheeks had turned.

Cis was accustomed to give way to these little flights of sentimentalism at times; and Gretchen, who knew how little he had really cared about her in those "old days," of which he was wont now to make so much, found such speeches particularly trying to bear.

"I must go and dress," she said, striking a match and lighting the candles, lest Cis should relapse into the "twilight mood."

"Wait one minute; I have really something to ask of you," said Cis, sitting upright on the sofa.

"Well, make haste," said Gretchen, in the most practical voice; adding immediately, lest he should think her unkind, "I shall be so glad to do anything for you, as you know well."

"My wife is going to give a musical party—will you come and play at it?" said Cis.

"O no, no!" cried Gretchen, in sudden dismay, while her blue eyes looked at him with a sort of horror; for what woman can bear the thought of meeting face to face that other more successful woman who fills the place she has wished to occupy herself? "I cannot do that—pray don't ask me."

"Why not? It is not I who ask you—she will. She was talking of whom she should get to perform at this party to-night at dinner, and some one recommended you. I think it was Lady Caroline Skinfint."

"Lady Caroline is a very kind friend to me, but do not ask me to go to your wife's house. I—I should not like it," she said, hesitatingly.

"But I should like it so much, Gretchen," pleaded Cis, whose vanity, always a weak point with him, was flattered by her evident distress. "Do go, to please me."

"I will think it over, but I had much rather not. I do not see why you want me to go—you can always come and see me here; and now I must go—good-night." She held out her hand to him for an instant, and left him, and Cis sauntered down idly to his club.

He was not exactly in love with Gretchen, but it pleased him to think that she was very fond of him. And just as in old times, from sheer idleness and insouciance, he had slipped into a sort of semi-sentimental flirtation with her, which had meant nothing but selfish self-indulgence to himself, but which had brought a great deal of trouble to the girl whose friend he professed to be, so now he had let himself slide with the stream into much the same position with her. To be the sport of fate, the victim of circumstances, was Cecil Travers's character in everything. He had good instincts, but he was too indolent to act up to them—he could be generous and even energetic in fits and starts, but he had no strength, either moral or physical—he was neither bad nor vicious, he was simply utterly and deplorably weak.

Gretchen, to whom fortunately five years, without robbing her of any of her gentle modesty, had nevertheless brought some knowledge of the world—without ever ceasing to love and honor the man who had done so much for her when she was poor and homeless, had nevertheless lost much of the admiration and almost adoration with which she had regarded him in old days. Her idol had stepped down somewhat from his pedestal, and Gretchen's heart, which was of that essentially feminine and gentle type which loves only the more because it pities and sees failings in that which it loves, felt no contempt for Cis, only a great yearning to make him happier and better.

It was unspcakably painful to her that he should talk so openly even to herself about the unhappiness of his married life, and the want of love between himself and his wife; it was painful, it was even shocking to her, and yet it was passing sweet to think that he should turn for comfort to her in his troubles.

For of course Gretchen took his part. Of course she felt anger and hatred towards the wife whose history she did not know, and whose proud beauty she had only once beheld.

Women, generally even the best of them, are cruelly severe towards each other. They are the harshest of censors, the most unjust of judges—for they condemn unheard. Gretchen heard vaguely in the outskirts of that great world into which she herself went in such an humble manner, that Mrs. Travers was a woman of fashion, was much admired and much sought after, and she at once formed her own conclusions. To her Cecil's wife was a heartless coquette, given over to dissipation, and worldliness, and love of dress, who neglected her husband, and made his home wretched in order to indulge freely in her own frivolous pursuits.

To go to the house of this woman who had not only taken Cecil irretrievably away from her, but who did not value that which she had won, seemed a very dreadful ordeal to Gretchen. Nevertheless, Cis had asked her to go—had said it would give him pleasure to hear her play at his house. To give Cis pleasure Gretchen would have gladly walked barefoot from Notting Hill to Grosvenor Street. So it came to pass that when Mrs. Travers, in a little monogrammed and perfumed note, presented her compliments

to Mdle. Rudenbach, and would be glad to know if she would be able to play for her on Thursday, the 20th inst., and what were Mdle. Rudenbach's terms, etc.—Gretchen in reply stated that she would be very happy to play at Mrs. Travers's evening party on the 26th, and begged to enclose her terms.

CHAPTER XX.

BENEATH A SMILING FACE.

VERY seldom indeed, in these days, did the old-fashioned iron gates at the end of the avenue at Sotherne Court open to receive their young mistress.

Mrs. Travers would not live in the home of her childhood. Now and then she would come down for a couple of days, or stop there a night, to break the journey to or from Scotland, but she could bear no permanent residence there.

Sotherne Court was a haunted house to her—haunted by ghosts of the past, which, under the present circumstances of her life, it was simply impossible for her to face.

Into the two months that Hugh Fleming had made Sotherne Court his home, had been crowded enough of associations and memories to fill every nook and corner of the old house.

There it was that he had stood as he had listened to her singing—in that chair he had been accustomed to sit in the evening—down that walk in the shrubbery it was that they had wandered together—under that tree they had sat together; there was not a room in the house, or a path in the garden, where she could not conjure up his image. Before her marriage she had loved these memories, but now they had become absolutely hateful to her. So the old house was left in undisturbed possession of Mrs. Blair and the servants.

This was a better state of things than Mrs. Blair had dared to hope for. Juliet had not been unkind to her stepmother, and Cis had always been favorably disposed towards her. As they did not intend to live at Sotherne themselves, there seemed no reason why Mrs. Blair should not continue to make it her home. So Mrs. Blair lived there on all the fat of the land.

She asked her own friends, French acquaintances, principally of her ante-nuptial days, to stay with her, greatly to old Higgs's disgust, who was loud in his grumblings

against the "dirty furrin French folk," as he insisted on calling a perfectly unobjectionable Monsieur and Madame Gambert, who were frequently guests at Sotherne.

Mrs. Blair played the country lady to these and other admiring friends, gave little dinner-parties for their entertainment, drove them out to see the show places in the neighborhood in the ancient landau, drawn by two remarkably fat and lazy old horses, and did the honors of Sotherne Court generally, as if the whole place belonged to her.

Higgs hated Mrs. Blair and her friends; the new state of things was abhorrent to him; but, like a brave man, he stuck to his post manfully. As long as he had breath and life, Higgs declared he would stay at Sotherne to serve his dear young mistress, and to prevent the old place from going to rack and ruin in the hands of a parcel of strangers. Higgs was a thorn in Mrs. Blair's side—he was forever doing things in direct opposition to her wishes. He often refused, respectfully but firmly, to obey her orders, stating that his duty to Mrs. Travers prevented him from doing so.

"Very sorry, ma'am, but my conscience wouldn't allow me no peace if I were to give out that there old silver tea-service," was the sort of remark he was wont to make; "seeing that my mistress is away, and I left in charge, as it were, of her property—anything to oblige you, marm, I am sure, but I must do my duty *just!*"

And Mrs. Blair might entreat, or threaten, or storm, it was all of no avail. Higgs would jingle his keys as if to say, "Don't you wish you may get it!" and go off to his pantry chuckling over her discomfiture.

Mrs. Blair would have given a great deal for Higgs to leave, and in pursuance of that object she made herself as ungracious and unpleasant to him as she possibly could; but unluckily Higgs saw through it, and was well determined not to give her that supreme triumph.

"She thinks as how I'll give warning," said the old man to himself; "she wo't find Ebenezer Higgs so easy to move. I'll stay here till I drop sooner than go, if it's only to spite her! I aint *her* servant, and she can't give me the sack!" And so the only result of the feud between them was that Higgs made himself more intensely disagreeable than ever, and on hearing shortly after the dispute concerning the silver tea-

service that Mrs. Blair expected some friends to stay with her for Christmas, he took the opportunity of declaring that the dining-room grate was breaking to pieces, and had the whole fireplace taken out and sent off to the ironmonger's to be renewed; so that the company had to use the breakfast-room, and Mrs. Blair had to postpone a dinner-party which she had intended giving in honor of her guests.

Of course all these things were very trying; but still, on the whole, Mrs. Blair was by no means dissatisfied with her lot in life. Day after day she congratulated herself upon the successful termination of all her hopes and plans. How well everything had turned out, and how different everything would have been if she had not stopped that letter from Colonel Fleming! Of course Juliet would never have married Cis—that odious guardian would have come back, and she herself would have been turned adrift upon the world with a very small income, whereas now everything had ended for the best. She had a comfortable and luxurious home and plenty of servants, whom she neither kept nor paid to wait upon her; she had no expenses, and her position in the county as Mr. Blair's widow was everything that she could wish. And as to Juliet, she of course was perfectly happy—probably much happier than if she had been allowed to marry her colonel; no one would ever know anything about that letter now, and Mrs. Blair felt convinced that she had done right, perfectly right, in suppressing it. After all, the result had justified the means. All's well that ends well.

Of her nearest neighbors and connections, the Traverses of Broadley, Mrs. Blair saw but very little. Five years had not passed away without working sundry changes for them.

Mary was married to a well-to-do squire in the next county, and Flora had shot up into a tall thin wisp of a girl of sixteen, with a face like Georgie's, but with a promise of more beauty than had ever belonged to her dead sister. And between the squire and the dead past, Time had already begun to spread his cobweb veil. Slowly, but surely, Georgie's memory became—not forgotten—for when can a father ever forget his dead child?—but vaguer and more indistinct; the bitterness went out of the recollection of her, and only the sweet savor of her goodness and gentleness left its

halo around her early grave. The home gap was slowly filling up again, as all such gaps do—God forbid that they should not. However wide the breach that is made, however hopeless the blank may be, the strangeness and the agony of it does in time wear off—the wound may leave its scars, but the open sore heals up.

Squire Travers was indeed no longer the same man he used to be—he was more subdued and patient in manner, less irritable, and less given to strong language; but he no longer now gave way to fits of melancholy and depression.

He had been very pleased at his son's marriage, and that event had certainly been the first thing that had roused him from the utter prostration that had followed upon his daughter's death.

Then, although, as he had himself said, he would never again keep the hounds, yet, after two winters had passed away, the old hunting instinct had awoke again, and when the third season came round he had found himself quite unable to resist it.

When he had stood looking out of the window one afternoon in November for some time, and then had suddenly turned round and said to his wife, "I think I shall potter out on Sunbeam to-morrow morning—I hear the hounds meet at Cosby Farm," the speech had been hailed by Mrs. Travers as very good news indeed. After that he went out regularly, far or near, a little shamefacedly at first, lest any one should think him heartless to his daughter's memory, but by-and-by with all the keenness and zest revived; besides, Wattie had set his mind at ease.

"She would have liked you to go out again, I know," he had said to him, and the squire had silently pressed his hand.

"It would have made her miserable to think you had given up hunting, and it does her no good, poor darling," continued Wattie; "besides, you have Flora to think of."

Yes, there was Flora; for her sake it was desirable that her father should go out with her instead of leaving her, as had lately happened, to the care of the groom—for Flora, like Georgie, "had it in her," and no considerations could stop her from slinking off after the hounds whenever they came within reasonable distance.

There was one thing that the squire could not be too particular about with his younger daughter, and that was in the matter of

the horses she rode. No half-broken, untamed animal should ever carry a daughter of his again; every horse Flora mounted was well trained and broken in for a lady's riding, and warranted free from all sorts of vices. The squire, too, gave long prices for them.

Flora, who was quite as fearless and bold as her sister ever had been, sometimes resented this extra care that was taken of her; but one look from Wattie Ellison was generally sufficient to make her silent and submissive.

It was by no means an unhappy scene that was going on one mild winter's morning in the paddock at the back of the house. A number of hurdles had been set up at equal distances round the field, and Flora, mounted on a splendid young thoroughbred horse which her father had just bought for her, was careering round, taking the hurdles one after the other in steeple-chase fashion, whilst her father and Wattie, Davis the groom, and poor old Chanticleer, stood together in a group in the centre.

"Why, papa, you look like the showman at Astley's!" cried Flora, as with flushed cheeks she trotted up to them after her exploits. "There you stand twisting about and flourishing your whip. I ought to have on pink skirts and spangles, and then we might get up a regular circus. Fancy you jumping through a paper hoop, papa!" And Flora laughed merrily with all a younger child's sauciness and impudence.

"You would look uncommonly well in spangles, I have no doubt, Flora," said Wattie, patting her horse's neck, and looking up admiringly at her; upon which Flora made a pass at his hat with her whip, which of course she missed, and then shook her fist at him with such a happy laugh, and looking so pretty the while, that, child as she was, there seemed to be some foundation for the county gossip, which reported that Wattie Ellison was only waiting till Flora should be eighteen to transfer openly to her the affection which he had formerly given to her sister.

That this was the squire's dearest wish cannot be denied. He was so devoted to Wattie, that his poverty and small income were as nothing to him; he had calculated that he could give Flora enough to live on comfortably, and to secure this once despised young man as his son-in-law was now one of his greatest hopes.

So the squire took to hunting again, and Flora became his constant companion. Her mother shook her head lugubriously, and prophesied all sorts of evil things, but in the long run she was too pleased to see her husband more like his old self again to be very much disturbed, especially as Amy's education engrossed a good deal of her time; and as that young lady showed no tendency whatever for hunting tastes, she was able to carry out all her theories about the training of young ladies in a satisfactory manner in the person of her youngest daughter.

During the course of that same third winter, when the squire took again to his hunting, an event happened which plunged the whole family into great grief for several days. This was the death of faithful old Chanticleer.

One morning the old hound refused the bread and milk which Flora had never once forgotten to give him every day in obedience to Georgie's dying wishes, and presently he hobbled up to her, for he had become very lame and infirm, and, lying down on the corner of her dress, licked her hand once, and then turned over on his side, and died without a struggle.

It was as if the last link with Georgie had been cut away—the old dog had for her sake become a general favorite, and even Mrs. Travers was upset at his sudden death. But after that, and save for that distressing incident, things altogether had fallen back into peaceful and happy grooves at Broadley House.

And Juliet—how had it fared with Juliet during these first five years of her married life? The first year after their wedding Mr. and Mrs. Travers spent in travelling abroad, and it was during these travels, and after she had been married more than three months, that Juliet at length found courage to write to Colonel Fleming. It was but a note, merely a few lines, thanking him for his wedding presents to her, and expressing her admiration of them; and then with a trembling hand she added:

"You have accused me of harshness and coldness towards you, and of silence. Of the two former I am certainly guiltless, and of the latter I cannot understand that *you* should accuse me"—words which, when he read them, puzzled and bewildered him beyond description.

After their year abroad, Mr. and Mrs.

Travers came home, but not to Sotherne; they bought a large house in Upper Grosvenor Street, and there established themselves.

For her beauty, her wealth and her talent, Mrs. Travers soon gained a reputation in the London world; no one was so well dressed, or rode such good horses—no one drove such a perfect pair of ponies in the morning, or reclined in such a well-appointed barouche in the afternoon; her dinners were faultless; her evening parties, filled with the elite of London society, were invariably successes; she was courted, flattered, admired, and sought after; she had everything that money, and youth, and beauty could give her, and yet—and yet the woman was miserable.

For, to begin with, Juliet was daily discovering how true her own instincts had been when she had told Cis Travers long ago that they never could be happy together—that they were totally unsuited for each other, that her life and her mind were in no way similar to his, and that she and he must forever go along different paths.

Juliet began to realize that most painful of all positions for a wife—that her husband was inferior to herself. He was her inferior in everything—in mind, in refinement, and in character. She had known it long ago—all her life, indeed—but she had not certainly understood until she was married to him how irksome and how unbearable such a reversal of the fitness of things would be to her. She did not dislike her husband; far from it. She was indeed fond of him in a sort of way; but she derived no comfort or support to herself from his society. She was forever bending down to his level, trying to enter into his thoughts and feelings, whilst he could not in the smallest degree sympathize with or understand hers.

After a time Cis became dimly conscious that things were not as they should be between them; he could not understand the cause of it, but he began vaguely to perceive the effects, and with the natural weakness of his character, instead of making the best of the unalterable, he turned it into a perpetual subject of grumbling and complaint. He became fretful and peevish, and was forever reproaching his wife with her coldness and want of affection, until Juliet one day, fairly exasperated, turned round upon him, and reminded him that

she had told him before she married him that she did not love him, and that, having chosen to take her without affection, he had no right to reproach her for the want of it now.

After that, Cis let his wife pretty well alone, and took to going to Gretchen Rudenbach to pour out his troubles. Gretchen could understand him, he thought, with that fine vanity which always makes a man think himself understood by the woman who loves and admires him, although probably she has fifty times less comprehension of his true character than the woman who has not affection enough for him to make her blind to his faults.

And Juliet went her own way. She had now but one object in her life—to forget; and if there is one thing more unattainable than any other unattainable thing that is beyond our reach, it is that same gift of forgetfulness! Hard indeed it is to find where we may drain a draught of the waters of Lethel!

The bitter thought of what might have been in comparison with what is, is one that it is almost impossible to shut entirely out of our minds.

To a man, hard mental work does perhaps sometimes succeed in keeping at arm's length the ghosts of past joys and the tortures of unavailing regret; but a woman can seldom hope for such a safe and wholesome discipline. To her no sort of work is open, but the unending toil of pleasure; and pleasure which cannot occupy the brain has no power whatever to obliterate recollection.

It was in vain that Juliet Travers plunged into a whirl of dissipation which lasted day and night, and for which she had no natural taste; in vain that she filled up every waking hour with engagement after engagement, that she surrounded herself with friends and acquaintances of the most frivolous type, who served, it is true, to amuse her, but who often disgusted her at the same time with their worldly shallowness. For a time, indeed, her thoughts might be distracted by what was going on around her; but wherever she went, and whatever she was doing, it was seldom indeed that the image of Hugh Fleming was entirely out of her mind.

She did her very best to stifle the ever-present thought of him—every feeling of honor and of duty urged her to do so; and

yet the task became daily more and more impossible to her.

I am conscious that my heroine does not come out well at this period of her life; but I am not placing her before you as a perfect character, but as a woman full of faults and failings, who was tempest-tossed on a stormy sea, and who was groping her way helplessly, and not very successfully, through the darkness.

Juliet was no saint—she was very human indeed; and at this time of her life her better instincts and nobler qualities were certainly somewhat obscured.

She became very reckless—reckless of good or evil, and very bitter against her life. Had there been anything in it to reconcile her to it, it might not have been so.

Had she had children, everything would probably have become different to her; but she had no child, and daily her husband, whom she had never loved, drifted further and further away from her. No one was dear to her; even the memory of her lost love, which had been so chillingly thrown back upon her, was so filled with bitter humiliation and wounded pride, that it had no power to soften her.

There is not perhaps a more dangerous and soul-degrading state of things than for a woman who has naturally a warm heart and quick impulsive feelings to be thus stranded, with every natural channel dried up wherein her affections should flow.

Failing love, such a woman often seeks to fill up the blank with admiration and flattery, thus perverting all the best and highest feelings of her nature.

And failing love—the one thing she yearned for unavailingly—there was no lack of admiration and adulation for the beautiful Mrs. Travers.

She grasped at them eagerly, hungrily; without these things, empty and unsatisfying as they were, she often felt that she should die; they served to drown her longings, and to keep at bay those other miserable thoughts which were forever assailing her.

Therefore it was that Mrs. Travers hurried restlessly from place to place—that as soon as Goodwood week had brought the London season to a close, she must needs go to Homburg or Baden for a month, then back again to spend the autumn months in large country houses filled with the acquaintances of the season, where London life was

but repeated *al fresco*, then generally to Paris for Christmas time, or down into Leicestershire with her hunters for a couple of months' hunting until the time for the season came round again.

In all these arrangements Cis for the most part acquiesced. Juliet always had the upper hand, and had, moreover, been so long accustomed to be absolute mistress, that it would have required a far stronger character than his to have dictated to her in these matters.

Juliet did not drag him about unwillingly; if he liked, he could come with her—if not, he might go elsewhere, wherever he liked; it was quite immaterial to her—she had always plenty of friends to go with her. So it often happened that she was staying alone at this or that country-house, whilst Cis, who neither hunted nor shot, and therefore found himself very much bored in the country, would be sauntering up and down the King's Road at Brighton by himself, or else living as a bachelor in Grosvenor Street, and spending the best part of his idle days in Gretchen Rudenbach's drawing-room.

Often in a house full of well-dressed and fashionable women, Juliet Travers would be the very life and soul of the party, the centre round which all the men staying in the house would gather. Often, after an evening, when, resplendent in costly jewels and rare laces, she had fascinated every one by her beauty and by her conversation, her host and hostess would agree that no party was complete without so gifted and talented a guest; the men would sing her praises *long and loud* in the smoking-room; whilst the women, gathered in knots in each other's bedrooms, filled with all the spite and envy that small-minded women always feel to any one of their own sex who outshines them, would pick her to pieces, or "damn with faint praise" the woman they had possibly parted from a minute before with clinging kisses and soft-voiced murmurs of endearing words.

And meanwhile the object of all this admiration and envy, with all her satins and diamonds flung aside, would be kneeling dishevelled by her bedside, shaken with convulsive sobs, and pressing to her lips with despairing moans a yellow faded note and a soiled and stiffened glove.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT HOME AGAIN.

It is breathlessly hot in early June, the hour is midnight, the scene is the crush-room of the Covent Garden Opera-house.

It is a popular night, the last strains of Gounod's "*Faust*" have but lately died away; behind the scenes, according to a well-known and time-honored tradition, the injured but forgiven Marguerite, who has just been wafted up to heaven by ingenious machinery among blue muslin clouds, together with the too fascinating Faust and the scarlet-tinted Mephistopheles, are all supposed to be sitting amicably together refreshing themselves with oysters and bottled stout, whilst in the front of the house the audience are crowding down the staircase and out into the entrance in search of their carriages. Not a very active search either. Now and then somebody's carriage is loudly proclaimed to be "*stopping the way*," and one or two people rush frantically out in violent haste; but for the most part the well-dressed bright-colored throng stands contentedly looking about, in no hurry to be gone, nodding at distant and unget-at-able acquaintances over each other's heads, or merely staring at each other curiously or admiringly as occasion may demand.

Standing a good way back from the staircase, and very much jammed in between a fat paterfamilias with his flock behind him and two pretty-looking well-dressed women who are chattering together in front of him, stands a man who is evidently alone and almost a stranger to the scene in which he finds himself.

He looks vaguely round upon the crowd, and sees not one familiar face, not one kindly smile, not one friendly nod. Yes, there a remembered face goes by, and stares blankly, unknowingly at him as it passes—he is forgotten!

"This is solitude—this is to be alone," he mutters to himself with a half cynical smile; "and people call this coming '*home*'!" he added, and the smile died away into a sigh.

He is a striking-looking man, still in the prime of life, tall and upright, but with many hard lines which care as well as time have traced upon his bronzed and weather-beaten face. A certain superiority about the man, and a certain stamp of birth and breeding, cause the two women who are in

front of him to turn round more than once to glance up at him.

"Who is that?" whispers one.

"I don't know," replies the other in the same tone; "he looks like somebody, but I don't know that I ever saw him before."

And then they forget him, and go on with their chattering aloud.

Suddenly a name spoken by one of them arrests the stranger's attention.

"Don't you know who that is? Why, that is the beautiful Mrs. Travers, who is making such a sensation this season."

"Which—the dark one?"

"Yes, the tall dark woman, with the diamonds and the black Spanish lace thrown over her head."

"How lovely she is!"

"Yes, lovely enough. That little fair woman with her is Mrs. Dalmaine, her great friend. Don't you remember the scandal there was about her two seasons ago?"

"O, perfectly; you don't mean to say she is here still! Why, there was to have been a divorce."

"O, it was all hushed up, and she goes about under Mrs. Travers's wing now, so I suppose she is all right."

"And is that Mrs. Travers's husband who is offering her his arm?"

"Lor' no, my dear! the husband never shows. They say he is a muff, or a misanthrope, or a savant, or something of that kind," answered the other; "at all events, he is never with his wife; that good-looking fellow is Lord George Mannersley—he has been dancing attendance upon her all the season; she never goes anywhere without him. It is really quite *dreadful* the way some married women go on! If you and I were to do such things, my dear, everybody would cut us; but just because she is rich and the fashion, nobody seems to think anything about it. They say Lord George is over head and ears in love with her, and gives her such splendid presents; isn't it *shocking*! And Mrs. Robertson told me the other day that she had it from Lady Walters, who is very intimate with her, that she knows for a *fact*—hush, it would never do to say it aloud, but—" and the rest of the communication was delivered in a whisper. It was probably something very spicy, for the two ladies giggled, and then shook their heads with a little sham horror over it, as if to say "Very sad, but how delightful a bit of scandal is! and even if it does take away

an innocent woman's character, what does it signify, so long as it affords us a little amusement!"

And Hugh Fleming, standing behind them, an unwilling listener, heard it all.

Heard it; and then, following the direction of their eyes, saw her once again.

She was standing a little way up the staircase, leaning somewhat languidly against the wall; the woman who had been pointed out as Mrs. Dalmaine—a bright lively little blonde, with a too straw-colored chignon, and a suspicion of blacking about the eyebrows and eyelashes, stood chattering away merrily beside her, whilst in front of her, holding her fan, and fanning her at times with it, stood a remarkably handsome young man, with the deepest blue eyes, and the blackest of curly heads, and a long mustache. He was talking, seemingly, to Mrs. Dalmaine; but his eyes were riveted on the lovely face of Mrs. Travers. She took but little part in the conversation; every now and then she smiled, or put in a word or two, and at every instant she bowed her head gracefully to some one or other of her friends among the stream of people who passed along down the staircase.

She looked tired and slightly bored, and when "Mrs. Travers's carriage" was shouted from below, and her footman appeared at the doorway, she took Lord George Mannersley's arm with alacrity, as if glad to be off.

Her name was so well known as a London beauty that not a few pressed forward to look at her as she passed out, and amongst them Colonel Fleming, too, pushed to the front rank. He stood close by the door through which she went out. He saw her sweet face, with all, and more than all, its well-remembered beauty, yet with a certain gravity and a certain hardness in the lines that were new to it; he had time to note the wistful unsatisfied look in her dark eyes, and he heard her voice as she came past him.

"Wont you come to my rooms to supper? Do!" Lord George was saying to her, entreatingly. "There is no reason why you should not. We have got Mrs. Dalmaine, and Castleton is sure to drop in to make a fourth. Don't be so cruel as to refuse."

"I am afraid I must," she answered, flushing a little at his eagerness. "I am very tired to-night; I had rather go home."

And then she passed close by him. There was a flash of the diamonds in her hair, and

on her bosom; a whiff of the perfume from her bouquet; her rich black satin draperies brushed against his feet as she went by—he could have put out his hand to hold her back; she was so near—so near—and yet, alas! so very far.

Her carriage rolled away, and Hugh Fleming turned out alone into the crowded squalid streets.

It was thus that he had met her again—the woman who had been his ideal ever since he had left her! The same, yet no longer the same—no longer the girl he remembered with the light of truth and candor in her eyes, with the best and highest instincts of womanhood shining out in her ever-varying face, but a woman who already wore a mask of hardness and worldliness, whose eyes had grown cold and unloving, whose laughter, as she passed by him, had sounded hollow and unreal.

And worse even than this—she was a woman whose doings had become talked and gossiped about, whose bosom friend was said to be of dubious reputation; whilst already the breath of scandal had coupled her own name with that of the worthless young profligate on whose arm he had seen her leaving.

Bitter, most bitter, were Hugh Fleming's reflections as he paced slowly along towards his club and thought on these things.

What had changed her? What had happened to her? Was this the result of the loveless marriage which he himself had urged upon her? Or was there other and deeper mischief still going on?

Still pondering on these things, Hugh Fleming stood back for an instant at a crossing in Berkeley Square, as a brougham, drawn by a showy-looking pair of horses, dashed by him.

It was Mrs. Travers's carriage. By the light of the lamps as it passed, he could see that Mrs. Dalmaine was no longer there; she had probably been dropped at her own house. There were only two people in the carriage—Mrs. Travers herself, and by her side Lord George Mannersley's handsome head bending forward and talking eagerly and animatedly to her.

Colonel Fleming saw them both perfectly, and then the brougham dashed by, and left him standing alone in the darkness of the empty street.

And as he stood there, there raged at his heart one of the original savage instincts

which education and civilization have no power to destroy in a man's breast—a fierce, murderous, maddening jealousy.

Women are supposed to have a monopoly of this same vice of jealousy; but the jealousy of a woman—far easier aroused, it is true—finds its vent in small spite, and malice, and backbiting. But for the good, strong, unadulterated flavor of the passion, commend me to the jealousy, just and excusable, of a man towards that other man who seeks to injure the fair fame of the woman whom he loves.

A man who is a prey to such a jealousy becomes, for the time, a savage or a wild beast.

As Hugh Fleming stood there, looking after Juliet's departing brougham, he could gladly, eagerly, joyfully have strangled the man who was sitting in it beside her. He would have blessed you or any one else who would have given him the opportunity of trampling that dark clustering head in the mud of the gutter, and of quenching forever the light in those deep blue eyes that, all unconscious of the murderous thoughts so near them, were feasting themselves on Juliet's beauty.

"And it was for this that I gave her up! My God, for this!" he muttered below his breath, as he strode on with all the fierce turmoil of bitter hatred surging within him.

Mrs. Travers's house in Upper Grosvenor Street was a *chef-d'œuvre* of good taste and luxury. No money had been stinted in its furnishing and decoration; nothing had been spared that could add either to the refinement or to the comfort of every room in the house.

In Juliet Travers's drawing-room there were no masses of gilding, no heavy painted cornices, no crimson satin damask, no blaze of color and vulgarity; no trace, in short, of the upholsterer's and the house-decorator's hand, to bewilder or to oppress you with suffocating grandeur.

Everywhere were harmony and fitness; sober coloring and fastidiousness of taste; rich dark draperies; luxurious couches, valuable pictures in Venetian frames mellowed by the glow of age, priceless old china, delicate Sevres or quaintest Bristol and Worcester, set out by careful hands upon dark shelves and brackets; bookcases filled with every book that a lover of art or literature could desire; the piano covered with the best and highest style of music; whilst the

reviews and magazines of the day found their places in a general and rather pleasant litter on the tables.

Nothing indicates so well the character of a woman as the room in which she is accustomed to live. Not all the emptiness of Juliet Travers's present mode of life, not all the frivolity of most of her daily associates, could wholly obliterate that refinement of taste, that keen appreciation of all that is beautiful and improving to the mind, which a thoroughly well-educated woman, whatever may be her surroundings, retains more or less throughout her life.

Juliet's drawing-room in Grosvenor Street was like an essay on her own character—the good things were all there, but they were all left in disorder and confusion.

She is sitting at the writing-table on the morning after the opera, her pen in hand, and a pile of invitation cards beside her, which Mrs. Dalmaine, at the corner of the table, is busily filling up, ticking the names off a long paper list as she does so, whilst Juliet leans back in her chair, and stares idly out of the window.

"How lazy you are, Juliet!" says Mrs. Dalmaine, who, we may as well charitably remark *en passant*, had never been anywhere near the precincts of the Divorce Court; although, for a fast young woman with an old husband, she had certainly done as many foolish and imprudent things as had sufficed to give a certain color to sundry slanderous and utterly untrue reports about her. "How lazy you are! Here you are, sitting staring at nothing, like a lovesick damsel, whilst I am slaving away in your service! Are the Blackwoods to be asked? What do you want a lot of old fogies filling up the rooms for? When I give a musical crush, if I ever do, I won't have a single woman over fifty in the room. What is the good of them? They are not ornamental, and they take up just the room of two ordinary people—these old women do so run to fat!"

"Nevertheless, I think I must ask the Blackwoods, Rosa," answered Juliet, with a smile; "they are very old friends of my father's, and it is often difficult to show civility to old-fashioned people."

"Well, certainly it is doing them off cheap, so here goes their card. By the way, have you had an answer from your professionals yet—that Miss Kudenbach?"

"Yes, here is her note—she comes. I

cannot think what made Cecil of all people recommend her! he seemed quite eager about engaging her—he hates music, you know!"

"Ah, my dear, you never can tell a man's motives!" answered Mrs. Dalmaine, with a knowing little nod, as she ran her pen through the Blackwoods' name on the list in front of her. "You should never inquire too closely into a husband's fancies—you never can tell what the quietest of them are up to!"

"Nonsense!" said Juliet, rather impatiently. "Have you finished that list, Rosa? Well, here is the next—the men."

"Ah, how delightful! how I love men!" cried the little woman, applying herself with diligence to study the paper presented to her. "Dear delicious beings! not half of them will come, you know, Juliet; they never do, even to your parties, and you get more than most people. You will only get your own lovers—about a dozen or so."

"What rubbish you do talk! I have no lovers, Rosa. I wish you would not say such things," said Juliet, frowning a little angrily.

"No? O, I am sorry I used the word—what shall I call them—admirers—slaves—sweethearts? What do you call Lord George, for instance; a mixture of all three?"

"I am sick of Lord George!" cried Juliet, impatiently jumping up from the table and scattering her writing things on to the floor.

"And yet you would miss his attentions sorely if he withdrew them!" said Mrs. Dalmaine, who was not wanting in shrewdness. "My dear girl, don't be absurd. We all know that you don't care a farthing for Lord George, but he is the best-looking man about town, and it gives you a *prestige* to be seen about with him, and all the women are dying with rage and envy of you. Believe me," continued Mrs. Dalmaine, looking up solemnly at her friend, and speaking emphatically and slowly, as if she was laying down some grand moral maxim, "believe me, there is no finer position in life than that of a woman who has succeeded in exciting the envy and the hatred of nine out of every ten of the women of her acquaintance—it's the finest position, Juliet; think what a success among the men!" it implies."

Juliet could not help laughing. "What morals you have, Rosa! and the best of it

is, I really think you believe in what you say."

"Why, of course I do!" answered Mrs. Dalmaine, opening her eyes. "Why should I not? haven't I gone through it all, and don't I know what horrors those hateful women who never have any admirers themselves say of one, and haven't I got the whip hand of them all forever? because I don't care one brass farthing what they say, and they know it. Don't you be a goose, Juliet; you keep your Lord George—you will find him very useful."

"Well, there he is!" said Juliet, as a hansom dashed up to the door; "so now I shall begin by making use of him to take you into the park this morning. I really cannot go, and you must both come back to luncheon. How d'ye do, Lord George? You and Mrs. Dalmaine must excuse my going out with you this morning, as I am so busy. Come back and lunch with me by-and-by, and you will find me in an idle and gossiping mood; just now I am up to my eyes in sending out invitations for my next musical."

Of course there was an outcry at the idea of Juliet's not going with them, but it ended, as such disputes always did, in Juliet's getting her own way; and her two friends went out together, Mrs. Dalmaine nothing loth to parade her handsome cavalier in the park, and Juliet was left alone.

After they had been gone about twenty minutes, however, the bright sunshine and fresh breeze looked so tempting that she remembered some trifling thing she wanted at a shop in Audley Street, and put on her bonnet to walk round to it.

Going down stairs she tapped at her husband's study door, and receiving no answer, looked in. Cis lay full length on the sofa fast asleep, with a novel open on his chest. He opened his eyes as his wife came in, and began grumbling at being awakened.

"How lazy you are, Cis!" said Juliet, with scarce-concealed contempt, for her hus-

band often spent his mornings thus. "Get up, and put on your hat, and come out with me."

"What should I go out with you for? You have got that horrid Dalmaine woman with you. She always laughs at me."

"Don't abuse my friends, please! Besides, she is not here now. I am going out for ten minutes by myself; wont you come, Cis?" she added, in a conciliatory voice, laying her hand gently on his shoulder.

But Cis shook her off impatiently. "You don't really want me—it is all sham; you don't care a farthing about me!" and he turned sulkily away from her.

"You are enough to try the patience of a saint, Cis!" said Juliet, stamping her foot; and she slammed the door angrily behind her, and went out alone.

This was all the companionship she got out of her husband! Fretful sulks and reproaches whenever she made the slightest advances to him. Was it not better to go her own way, and to leave him completely alone? Some impulse, she had not known what, had impelled her to turn to him this morning; perhaps it was Mrs. Dalmaine's worldly theories, or perhaps the frequent recurrence of those visits from Lord George Mannersley; but something, some good feeling, some better instinct, had prompted her for once to seek out her husband, and this had been the result of it!

Sore at heart, wounded in her pride and in her best feelings, Juliet walked along in the bright morning sunshine, feeling very acutely what an utter mistake her whole life had been, how completely alone and unloved she was! Unavailing regrets, hopeless memories, rose bitterly in her heart. Half unconsciously, the name of Hugh Fleming escaped from her heart, and found utterance on her lips; and, as it did so, she turned the corner of the street—and met him face to face!

[TO BE CONTINUED.]